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Mercury Mystery
BOOK-MAGAZINE

KEEP AN EYE ON THE BODY — *Ed Lacy* 3

A Complete Mystery Novel

This exciting preview edition of Ed Lacy's newest novel, which will appear in hard cover edition this winter, features young Detective Dave Wintino, who finds that tracking a cop-killer and tailing a shapely but frightened dame is anything but kid stuff . . .

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Cover painting by ED EMSH
(*illustrating* KEEP AN EYE ON THE BODY)

Mercury Mystery Book-Magazine, NOVEMBER, 1956, Vol. 2, No. 8, Whole No. 221. Published bi-monthly by Mercury Publications, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Twelve issue subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions, Canada and the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Concord, N. H., under the act of March 3, 1879. © *1956 by Mercury Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Printed in U. S. A.*

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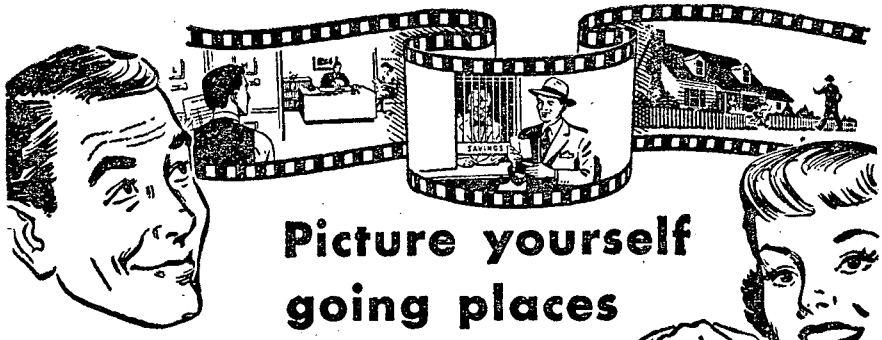

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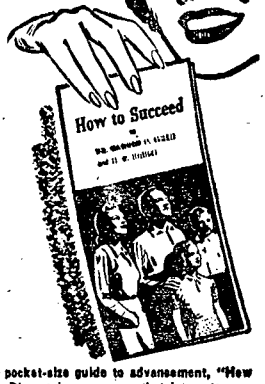

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Ed Lacy's hard-hitting mysteries have won him honors and international acclaim. His books, highly successful in this country, have been widely reprinted abroad and his novel, "The Best That Ever Did It" was voted one of the best mysteries of 1955 by Anthony Boucher . . . This preview edition of Mr. Lacy's newest novel features Detective Dave Wintino, youngest man on the N. Y. force. The wise guys said Wintino looked like a boy scout but finding the killer of an ex-cop didn't look like kid stuff to him. And making sure nothing happened to curvy Rose Henderson wasn't exactly child's play either . . .

KEEP AN EYE ON THE BODY

by ED LACY

TUESDAY NIGHT

IT WAS A FEW minutes before eleven when I unlocked our door. The dumb lamp we had in the 2 x 4 'foyer' was on. The lamp looked like a drippy flower and cost fifty-seven bucks strictly because it was imported from Denmark. If all their lamps are like this job, they must be blind over there. I could just about make out the couch opened as a bed, was surprised Mary was in the hay so early. I called out softly, "Babes?" She didn't answer.

I took off my coat and tie, then my shoulder holster, went through my pockets and put everything on the table beside the lamp. I dropped my suit on the floor, it was due for the tailors anyway and we only had one closet and no room for soiled clothes. I went to the john and washed, afraid I'd wake Mary if I moved the Chinese screen in front of our 'kitchenette' for a snack. For a hundred and twenty bucks a month you'd think we'd have room enough to move around. But not at this 'good'

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address on East 69th Street. Still I couldn't entirely blame Mary. I got some kicks out of living in a swank joint, all the modern nutty furniture we were in hock for. And yesterday almost all my pay check went for old bills. What kicks.

Bed felt great. I'd been going since eight in the morning. Staring up at the darkness I wondered if Ed Owens had lived in a hundred and twenty buck apartment. I saw Owens in the alley again. The wrong angle his body made said he had to be dead. Who dropped the newspaper over his face, the headline and pictures about the ball game? Why don't they want anybody to see a dead face? Or maybe the dead don't want to see us live jokers.

Mary had a heavy way of breathing, almost a light snore. I didn't hear it so she wasn't asleep, just laying there sore as a boil at me. I reached under the cover for her hips. She wasn't wearing one of my old shirts, but those damn ski-pajamas she bought to spite me. When my fingers found her, she pulled away. I said, "Look honey, I did try to call—at six—but you weren't home. I got stuck on a big case."

"Sure, you put in overtime, four to eleven, seven hours—a day's work on a normal job. What did you get, time and a half or double time, for it?"

She had that nasty shrillness to her voice that reminded me of Mom when she was steamed, way she sounded when she knew I was out boxing. The shrillness that meant—with both Mary and Mom—that talking was a waste of time. But I was so full of it I had to talk. "Look, babes, this is real big. I was in on the killing of an ex-cop. Guy named Ed Owens was shot down right in . . ."

"I'm not interested!"

I sat up in bed. "A man who'd been a good cop, gave almost 30 years of his life to protecting people, was shot down in an alley. Sure you're not interested, nobody is. That's the trouble today, nobody gives a fat damn about anything or . . ."

Mary turned over, faced me in the darkness. "Dave, you came home seven goddamn hours late, *seven hours,* so I'm hardly in the mood for any of your childish speeches."

She said 'childish' to steam me but I said evenly, "Maybe Owens' wife doesn't think it's a speech. Maybe she's wondering what the hell living is all about when a retired cop has to work as a twenty-five buck a week messenger and gets killed in the bargain. Some bargain."

"Is that what I have to look forward to, Dave, you lying dead in the street some night? My God what do you think was going through my head when you didn't come home?"

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I found her shoulder in the darkness, held it when she tried to turn away. "Babes, I said I tried to phone you. That was the only time I was near a phone. Had the big brass from downtown with me, couldn't get away even for a moment. Another thing, this is why I'm so interested in this case, I kept thinking if this was going to be me, working as a lousy messenger when I'm too old to be a cop. Nothing makes sense about the killing, no motive, no . . ."

"You're too old to be a cop now! Dave, I can't take this much longer."

"Now Mary, let's not start that."

"Why not?" she asked loudly and I knew her mouth was a hard line the way it always got when she was angry. When I first met her I thought that hard line was cute, used to tease her just to see the red lips fade into a line—and finally burst into a big smile. "I come home and make supper, sit around jumping out of my skin wondering what's happened to you. And at eleven o'clock my husband comes home and makes some small talk about his job—he talks about a killing!"

"*Small* talk? *Damn it,* an ex-cop was killed this afternoon!"

"Davie the boy do-gooder! I don't want to hear about it. And let go of my shoulder, or is this the loving touch, the 3rd degree?"

"That's dumb talk," I said, letting go of her. "And don't start crying." I reached out and snapped on the indirect lights that ran along the back of the studio couch. Even in the middle of the night Mary always looked sharp, the remains of her make-up clean and neat, her blonde hair brushed, the trim curves her breasts made even in the damn pajamas. I reached for one of the curves and she slapped at my hand and missed.

Anyway, she wasn't going to bawl. When she's real mad, Mary gets into a cold rage like she was about to spit ice. I looked at the hard line of her mouth and knew she wasn't going to cry at all: she was going to talk.

"A husband and wife can usually talk over what happened to them during the day, the office gossip and jokes, but what am I supposed to ask you? Who you caught robbing? What pimp you hit? And when can we ever talk? You work these crazy hours, nights, days, middle of the days, Saturdays, Sundays. You're off Thursday and Friday this week—a big week end ahead for me! Dave, what kind of a life do we have? I want to go out and see people, take in a movie on a Saturday night but you're only off one weekend a month. I get up in the morning and see my husband getting his tools ready for the day—a gun and a blackjack. And for what? I'm just a steno yet my take home pay is larger than yours, not to mention the hours."

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"In a little while I'll be making full salary. And I'll be eligible for retirement when I'm 41," I said and kept seeing Owens' puffy dead face. What kind of job could I get after 20 years as a cop? A store cop, guard, messenger? Why should a guy *need* a job when he retired? What was the point in retiring? "Babes, be reasonable, I'm doing okay. What the hell, I've no trade, only one year of college—you want me to be a forty buck a week stock clerk? Mary, you were all for me taking Civil Service exams: Okay, now I'm a cop, I have . . ."

"Of course I wanted you to take the exams, and get out of that horrible store basement. But if I'd known the risks you take as a cop, the crazy hours, the way it would shake up our life, I would have been against it then."

She shook her head and most of her trim body under the pajamas shook too. "Don't try to sell me, I know the pitch—you're David Wintino the youngest detective on the force. Want me to take out the newspaper picture of the commissioner shaking your hand?" She paused, "And clerks can become executives—when they have somebody behind them. Uncle Frank called me at the office, asked why you haven't been down to see him."

"Babes, I'm not interested in the freight business or in being the boss's pet relation."

"You were interested when he used his influence to keep you off the Youth Squad, or the times you got into trouble socking other cops—Dave, I said I can't take much more of this and I mean it. I'll be jittery as a sick cat in the office tomorrow and you know the way things are there—I goof once and I forget about ever becoming Mr. Jackman's secretary. You're just selfish. You're always against everything I want. You didn't want to live in a decent apartment. You argued about the furniture, don't like my friends—I've taken enough from you!"

"I know, now tell me how you stood up to your 150% All-American family when they found they were getting a Jew and an Italian in the family all in one package."

Her mouth opened wide now and her pug nose quivered and her eyes went big as she gasped, "David! That's a dirty horrible lousy thing to say!"

"Yeah, it was. Sorry babes. I'm on edge."

She got under the cover, turned her back to me. I put out the light. After a moment, I could hear her weeping. I rolled her over, kissed her, her hair so soft and her skin cool—where it wasn't wet with tears. I held her tight, a little proud that this beautiful chick was mine. For a

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moment that was all that mattered. "Honey," I whispered, "I don't mean to make you cry. We'll work things out."

"Nothing will change. You like being a detective."

"Babes, you want me to soft talk you? All right, I like the job."

Mary rolled out of my arms, said to the darkness, "Know why you like it? Because you're cocky, a know-it-all, and being a detective makes you feel good, you like authority, bossing people. You and your pretty face, you like that part of it too. You even enjoy looking like a 17 year old sharpie, you eat up the amazed look when people finally believe you *are* a real cop, a detective."

"Lay off me. Somebody has to be a cop," I said weakly.

"Somebody doesn't have to be *my* husband!"

"And if anything happened you'd break your back screaming for the police. You're like all the other fine law-abiding citizens."

"That's it exactly, whenever I need a cop I'll call for one. That's much different from being a cop's wife."

"How do you know, you never tried being a cop's wife?"

She shrilled, "Go ahead, say you resent my working. You'd like me to mope around the house like a glorified maid, thinking up ways of cooking supper for my big strong provider, whenever he decides to give the little lady a break and come home. Wise up. That corn went out with silent pictures. If I ever find myself doing that, I'll give you a fine supper each night—right in your face!"

"Listen to me, Mary, I . . . This is you and me talking in bed, not a couple of strangers shacking up for the night. You want to work a career, great. I never asked or wanted you to spend all your time handling a dust mop or a frying pan. I never tell you to change your job, why can't you understand that being a cop is my work, something I think is important? That's what I mean by being a cop's wife. Honey, before you get too set-up in this advertising business, let's have a kid."

"What?"

"I want a baby," I said, not really sure if I wanted one so soon. "We have a child now, by the time he's 15, we'll only be 36, we'll all be pals. Have your career, but let's make a baby first. And in a year—you'll only be 22 or 23 by then—we'll get somebody to look after the baby and you can go back to the agency business again. I don't know, maybe that's what we need to settle us. Don't you want a kid?"

"Not this way. I want my baby to have a father, not a lousy posthumous medal. No Davie." She started pushing again and I let go of her.

"What's this add up to, the kiss-off, Mary?"

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"You know now where I stand. As to how it's going to add up, that's for you to decide, Dave. Are you married to me or to your badge? I told you, I mean it. And I do, really."

That was a wallop that shook all the tiredness out of me. "You realize what the hell you're saying?"

"I certainly do because I know what fun it was before you got on the force. Even when we were living in that crummy room and watching our pennies. It was fun then. It isn't now. Goodnight, David."

"Goodnight, Mary." I turned toward the windows. Outside a car went by now and then, in the distance a horn sounded, then the small scream of breaks. If we ever got the furniture paid up, we could get on rubber ourselves, a good second-hand heap—although Mary would want a new car. Our marriage was getting to be one of those deals where everything had to be her way. And I'm selfish! Didn't matter whether I *wanted* to work for Uncle Frank or not. Uncle Frank, what a case. Him and his silly wife and those fat-assed kids who acted like a couple of fags.

I turned over and got comfortable. Mary was really sleeping now. I told myself, Okay, stop feeling sorry for yourself. And in the morning Mary will feel better. I should have phoned her, could have done it easily enough. Forget all this wind. All I should be thinking about is finding who killed Ed Owens. Think about that and only that.

It had been a little after two in the afternoon. Danny Hayes and I had just returned from an investigation and parked in front of the station house when Lt. Reed, in-charge of the Detective Squad, and Captain Lampkin, the boss of the precinct, came running down the old brick steps, jumped into our squad car as Lampkin said, "Killing. West End and 78th. Stick-up. Get the siren working." Lampkin was a big sloppy square who always talked like a teletype message.

Danny was driving and it was kind of cool for May so he was wearing the dirty trenchcoat that showed off his thick shoulders—made him look like something off a TV screen, except they never have colored detectives on TV. He made it pretty fast but Danny can't wheel a car like I can.

There were two radio cars plus the usual afternoon crowd of curious housewives when we got there. It was one of these old but still ritzy big houses, seven and eight room apartments. The body was at the entrance to the delivery alley that led to the back of the house, a plump man in a worn suit, the frayed collar on his white shirt and the dirty tie all bloody. One foot was bent far under the body in a position that would have hurt like hell if he'd been alive. He was wearing heavy socks with

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the ends of gray winter underwear stuck in them, high black shoes that needed resoling. There was the newspaper with picture of a ball game over his face and above it thick grayish hair and an old sweat-stained brown hat a few feet from his head. When Reed pulled back the paper this puffy face with some red veins in the long nose stared up at us with mild surprise.

All his pockets were turned out, the inside pocket torn. There was a torn wallet, a crumpled pack of butts, keys, a bulky old lighter, and a pack of mints scattered on the cement floor near his body.

The beat cop, an old beer-hound, slipped Lampkin a half-hearted salute as he told him, "I found him at six minutes before two, Walter—Captain. Only witness we got so far is this," he jerked a big thumb at a frightened young colored fellow in work pants and a torn army jacket, "who says he was coming out after delivering an order, groceries, when he seen the stiff. He yelled and I come a-running from the corner."

"God is me witness, I never saw him before! I know nothing except the mon is stretched on the bloody stone!" the delivery man said nervously. He spoke with a kind of British accent.

Lt. Reed gave Danny the eye. Danny went over and said softly, "Relax, homie, and tell me exactly what you saw. And don't worry, you're in no trouble. What island you from?"

"Trinidad, and I'm here all legal and . . ."

"Sure," Dan said gently. "My old man was from Barbados. Let's you and me step over here and talk a little."

Captain Lampkin pushed his cap back as he scratched his head, said, "Homicide will be here soon, along with the rest of the boys. Touch anything, Buddy?"

"Now Walter, long as I been a cop. Nobody has touched anything. I just spread the paper over his face. But see under his coat there, on the left side, that's a hip holster. Probably one of them little foreign automatics. Want me to pull the coat back, take his gun?"

"No, we'll wait," Lampkin said, taking off his cap to better scratch his fat head. "Yeah, does look like a holster. But I wouldn't pick him for a punk or a hood."

Lt. Reed waited politely for Lampkin to stop talking, then quietly told me to get the janitor, and start questioning the people in the house. The superintendent was no janitor, he had a regular little office with a typewriter and a desk. He was an old Swede wearing a starched collar and a worn blue suit. He said he was in his office when he heard somebody yelling police and came out to find the beat cop with the delivery man. He'd never seen the stiff before. I got his name down, along with

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the owners of the building and I was pretty excited—this wasn't the first dead man I'd seen, but it was the first gun killing. I found a couple of maids who'd been using the laundry room and didn't know a thing, but I put them in my notebook.

The alley began to fill up fast as the routine went into full swing. Some big cluck from Homicide was there, looking very important, a heavyset square whose suit was too small—probably didn't know yet that big men should stay away from 'Bargains'. He had a fat baby mouth and a necklace of chins. The son-of-a-bitch put me in the mood to pop him, and the rest of the men laughing, when he first saw me and asked, "What you doing here sonny? The super's son?"

When Reed said, "He's one of my squad, Detective Wintino," this big hunk of blubber did a hammy double-take as he said, "Jeez, he don't look old enough to be a Boy Scout."

In less than fifteen minutes the photographers and lab men had finished. The stiff was Edward Owens, a retired cop—he had his Policeman's Benevolent Association card in his wallet, along with a buck and a Chinese laundry ticket. He was working as a messenger for a brokerage house down on Wall Street. His gun, a .38 Police Special, hadn't been used and he'd been killed with one slug through the heart, fired at fairly close range. Reed had a couple of more detectives working and they hadn't found anybody who had heard the shot, noticed anyone in the service entrance. I thought I was going to be stuck going through the apartment houses across the street looking for witnesses, but Lampkin had called downtown for a detail to go to the brokerage house and have everybody there stand still. The Homicide clown, Anderson, decided he'd better go down there and Reed said, "Dave will drive you."

There was a radio car parked in front of the office building. As we braked to a stop, the siren still working, a lot of people stopped and I gave my hair a pat as I jumped out. I don't believe in looking sloppy. A well-built, solid-looking cop said to Anderson, "I've been holding an elevator for you. Room 619." It wasn't hard to spot Anderson for a dick.

The brokerage firm was a suite of three large offices with about a half a dozen stenos pounding typewriters. A cop was talking to a tall thin guy who looked shrunken and skinny. His hair was a lousy dye job, jet black. He looked about 60 and judging from the patches of stubble around his long jaw he still didn't know how to shave.

Anderson flashed his badge and so did I, but mine was on my belt. May look corny but I like to have both hands free. The cop nodded at the bag of bones, said, "This is Al Wales."

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"I'm a retired detective, fact is Ed and I were partners. If you'll step in here," Wales motioned with his head toward a small office, "I can give you all the dope you need. We'd also appreciate it if you'd remove the officer from the door and let business go on as usual. You know how it is, looks bad for a house dealing in bonds. Whatever happened to Ed, the dirty bastards who did him in, had nothing to do with his job here."

"The cop stays," Anderson said. "You in charge here?"

"No, I'm merely a part-time messenger, like Ed is—was. Step into the office and I'll have Mr. Stewart, our manager, join us."

The office was four plain chairs around a polished oak table with a clean glass ash tray in the center. Wales called out something to one of the girls as we went in and Anderson planted his large backside on the table. Wales stood by the door and I glanced out the window: We weren't up high enough for a view of the harbor or anything interesting. A plump joker with crew-cut gray hair, expensive brown pinstripe suit and a sweet tie, strode into the office. I mean strode, he must have practiced it. The walk matched his salesman face. He said, "Gentlemen! I'm Harris Stewart, office manager. Mr. Wyckoff, president of the firm, is in Washington. This is indeed a terrible piece of news about Mr. Owens. Simply incredible—there's absolutely no point to a robbery."

"Where was Owens going?" Anderson asked.

"According to the time sheet he checked out at five after one to deliver bonds to a client, a Mr. Jensen McCarthy who lives at 316 West End Avenue. Mr. Owens never delivered the bonds so we . . ."

"How do you know he didn't?" I asked, as Anderson gave me an annoyed look.

"Mr. McCarthy was waiting for them and he phoned a few minutes before you, that is, the police called to tell us the horrible news. Mr. McCarthy was in a hurry to leave for his house in Westhampton and asked where our messenger was. We must assume it was robbery although I can't understand it. Naturally we have a list of the bonds in my office."

"A guy carrying bonds is robbed and killed," Anderson said. "What's there hard to understand about that?"

"But the bonds are not negotiable, they're worthless except to the owner," Stewart said, waving his manicured hands.

"That's right," this Al Wales put in. "All we carry is mortgages and non-negotiable general bonds. Of course, assuming this was a robbery and that's what it looks like, whoever killed Ed might have thought he was carrying something worth taking. Must have been an amateur punk."

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"We didn't find any bonds on him," Anderson said. "If they were worthless why did you need an armed messenger?"

Stewart's eyebrows shot up. "Armed?"

Anderson nodded. "He was packing a gun, never had a chance to use it. You didn't know he carried a gun?"

"I most certainly did not. The firm never asked or authorized any employee to carry a gun." Stewart turned to Wales. "Did you know about the gun?"

Wales said, "The gun had nothing to do with the job. Most retired cops get a permit to carry a gun. You know that, Anderson. You say he never used his gun. Did it look like Ed was in a fight?"

"No. No bruises. One shot through the heart did it." Anderson turned to Stewart. "Bond messengers have to use the service entrance?"

"No."

"Owens was killed in an alley leading to the service door."

"That don't make sense," Wales said. "He never used any back doors. And Ed was a quick guy with his hands and his gun—when he was younger. Hard to believe he'd be taken without some kind of battle."

"Well, there wasn't any, far as we can tell. Either Owens handed over the bonds like he was told, and was shot; or he was shot before he knew what it was all about. And all over bonds that weren't worth a thin dime—a real dumb killing," Anderson said.

"Does sound like one of those jerky ones," Wales added.

"But his pockets were torn," I chimed in. "Means he was shot first and then searched fast. He never had a chance."

Anderson told Stewart, "Give me a list of the bonds, I'll get them on the wire. And I need a phone, boys at the local precinct will want to talk to this McCarthy right now."

"You can use the phone in my office," Stewart said. "I'll have one of the girls type up several copies of the bonds, serial numbers, and all the other information, at once."

Anderson nodded and stood, pulling his pants out of his rear like a slob. At the door he told me, "Stay here and write up Wales."

When they left Wales said, "We might as well sit down . . . Damn, who's going to tell Ed's wife, Jane, about this? They got a daughter working someplace in South America for an Oil Company. Had a boy who died when he was a kid. This will be rough on Jane."

I got out my notebook, wrote down Wales' full name, home address, last precinct squad he worked on, the Owens' home address. "How long you been working here, Mr. Wales?"

"About three years. Ed needed the dough but I'm all alone. I

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work to keep busy. My wife passed away back in '49, right after I retired from the force. When Ed started working here he got me on. Five hours a day, a way of passing time."

"You two the only messengers?"

"Yeah, I come on at nine and Ed came in at noon."

"If the bonds you carried were worthless why . . . ?"

"They're not worthless, but non-negotiable: There's a big difference."

"Sure. But if they weren't worth anything except to the owners, why did the firm only hire former policemen?"

"Because they know we're bondable, in good physical condition for our age, and only a fellow with a pension can fool around with a part-time job."

"You in the office when Mr. Owens was killed?"

"No, I left at eleven-thirty to take some bonds to a customer up on the Grand Concourse. He wasn't in so I came back here—about twenty minutes before the police arrived. You say Ed's pockets were torn—was his receipt book missing too?"

"All we found was a torn wallet, identification cards, some change, pack of butts, mints and a lighter. Receipt book mean anything?"

Wales shook his head again. "No. It's of no value. Shows some jerky kid must have done the job."

I wiggled on the chair, fixed the crease in my pants. "I don't think so. A jerk doesn't follow a messenger all the way uptown. And if it was a jerky kid in an on-the-spot stick-up, he would have taken the change, Owens' gun."

"Maybe. And maybe when the punk saw the gun he figured Owens for a cop and got scared. Could be a nut. If Ed wasn't tailed why should anybody rob him? Ed never dressed like money from home."

"Did he carry much cash?"

"Ed? Lucky to have a buck floating around his pockets. Every extra dime went on the ponies. Not that Ed was a real gambler, but a few bucks here and there every week. On that little pension they give us you don't raise any hell.'

"Did Mr. Owens have any enemies? Perhaps some character he once collared?"

Wales shrugged, a tired motion. "No. At least none I ever heard of. We were just run-of-the-mill detectives, the usual arrests. We had one big collar, got a killer in a gang war. But that was a long time ago and he went up in smoke in the chair. Of course Ed stayed on the force a couple of years after I left, he was a little younger. But he liked to talk. He would have told me if he thought somebody was after him."

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"We'll have to dig into his arrest record."

Wales smiled sadly. "Dig, dig, clear every little detail, that's a detective's life. A crime is like an iceberg, 1/10th showing and 9/10ths hidden."

"Iceberg—neat way of putting it. That's what they drilled into me at the Academy: Whenever you're stuck, dig into the case all over again."

Anderson came in. "Come on, Lampkin wants us back at the precinct house. Nothing more for us here."

As I stood up Wales climbed to his feet. "Mind if I ride up with you? I'd like to look around. Me and Ed—I mean, well, wouldn't hurt none."

"Come along. The captain probably wants to talk to you anyway."

Wales left the office and met us at the elevator, wearing an old battered plastic rain hat. I brushed against him as we stepped into the elevator; he wasn't carrying a gun. Wales said, "That's okay, I'm clean." There was a fresh odor of whiskey on his words.

Wales sat in the backseat and I got the siren going and shot up Broadway to Chambers Street, then wheeled over to the highway.

Anderson turned and asked Wales, "Ever see anything like this before? Makes a good collar while a rookie and he's an acting-detective 3rd grade before he can get corns on his feet. Me, I was a harness bull for over seven years."

Wales said, "Force is changing, lots of college boys on it now. I like the way this young fellow speaks, calls people mister. He'll be real good once he stops talking so much."

"What's that mean?" I asked, glancing at him in the windshield mirror.

Wales gave me his tired smile before he said, "You got to learn to ask questions, not hand out information. Doesn't make any difference in this case, but why tell Mr. Stewart and myself Ed's pockets were torn? Sometimes a little thing like that can trap a man."

"Damn right," Anderson said, "You have to . . ."

"You shoot your gums off too," Wales said dryly. "Right off the bat you told me the bonds were missing, and that Ed was packing a gun."

"That was a part of my questioning you. This is just an ordinary stick-up, let's not make a big case out of it."

"It isn't ordinary, an ex-cop was killed," I said.

At the station house Lt. Reed sent Hayes and me out to finish interviewing the people in the surrounding apartment houses. It was dull routine and we ended up with nothing; not a soul saw or heard a thing. There were the usual crackpots who "thought I heard several shots around four o'clock . . . Oh, he was shot at two . . . ?"

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By nine I was punchy and glad when Reed called us in. By the time I finished my paper work and had a bite with Hayes it was after ten. As I left the station house I saw Al Wales sitting in the muster room, his back against the crummy dirty green-colored wall. He sure had a bulge in his pocket now—a pint. His bleary eyes were open, staring at nothing. As I waved at him he mumbled, "Find the bottom of the iceberg yet?" He spoke like a man full of dull pain.

I turned over in bed, kicked the sheet up from my feet. My toes touched Mary's ankle. I stroked it with my big toe and she broke her heavy breathing with something that sounded like a whimper.

Everybody so certain it was a dumb hold-up and those are the hardest to solve, deadends where nothing makes sense. Two retired cops. Never know what Owens was like but Wales was okay, never once called me a runt or a kid. I was in bed, so was Danny Hayes and probably Anderson and the rest of the squad. Reed might still be up, waiting to hear what his stoolies knew, maybe had a man going over the nightly round-up of "undesirables." We were all safe in bed, doing nothing, while one of us was on a slab in the morgue.

I touched Mary's ankle again. Maybe she was right. A cop, an ex-cop, was dead and nobody really gave a damn. Just another stick-up victim, as if he hadn't spent most of his life trying to protect people. Hell, who was an ex-cop to get any more consideration than an ordinary murdered citizen?

I thought he should get a damn sight more consideration.

I suddenly smiled at the darkness. Dave Wintino the boy Dick Tracy! I didn't have a thing to go on but a hunch—like the feeling I had about the lead pipe in my big pinch. Maybe it was dumb to play a hunch . . . but *somehow* I was sure Ed Owens hadn't been killed in a stick-up.

WEDNESDAY MORNING

AT EXACTLY 6 A.M., I awoke as though an alarm had gone off—I can always do that. It was light outside already and looked like a good warm day.

After breakfast, I read the papers to see what they had to say about the Owens case. There was a picture of Owens in the alleyway and just

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a caption in the News. The Times surprised me by giving him a whole column. After a sentence saying he'd been shot in a hold-up while carrying non-negotiable bonds, they went on to say Owens and Wales had solved the murder of a Boots Brenner back in 1930. I never heard of the joker but the paper claimed he was well on his way to becoming the Al Capone of New York City when he was found in a vacant Brooklyn lot full of lead. "Within 24 hours, through brilliant detective work" Owens and Wales arrested a small time bootlegger named Sal Kahn who was running a still near the lot where Brenner's body was found. Kahn had a record of several arrests for making and selling booze. He admitted killing Boots when the gangster tried to muscle in on an electric still Kahn was running. The still was an "amazing work of scientific ingenuity" and although Kahn pleaded self-defense, he died in the chair without revealing the name of his partner, who had built the still. Both Wales and Owens had been cited by the Mayor for their fast work.

I gathered the politicians had been busting a "crime wave" and had used the death of a strong-arm goon to crow about how safe the city was.

I took the subway over to the precinct house, paying my fare. Seems dumb to me to advertise everyday that you're a detective. I walked into the detective room a few minutes before eight. Danny Hayes was already there, breezing with a sleepy-looking fat slob named Ace who has a terrific memory for faces.

"What's on the Owens deal?" I asked.

"You still got seven minutes before your tour starts," Ace said. "What you bucking for, Reed's job?"

"Everybody treats this as a big yak. We ought to spend a lot of time with Mrs. Owens, and with Wales, and dig into their past arrests. Plenty of work to do," I said.

"There certainly is, Wintino, and you can start by getting me a buttered roll and a container of coffee—light. Too tired to eat this morning," a voice said behind me.

I turned and Lt. Reed was standing in the doorway kind of stooped as though afraid of bumping his bald dome. He had tired circles under his eyes and needed a shave. I said, "Certainly, lieutenant," and took the two-bits he held out.

I had to wait till a fresh pot of the junk was brewed and I returned to find a tall, well set-up guy, about 37, sitting with Reed.

As I put the bag on the desk Reed said, "This is Detective Harris Austin from Homicide. You've met Detective Hayes; this is his partner, Detective Wintino. They were the first of my squad to reach Owens." Austin nodded at me.

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"Capt. Lampkin wants you to have a talk with Mrs. Owens. That's about the only angle we haven't covered thoroughly. I suggest you go over to her flat now. I'm sending Hayes downtown to the line-up to look over a rubber-check artist we're interested in, so take Wintino with you." Reed glanced at the wall clock. "Unless she gives you something, be back here around ten."

"Anything you say, lieutenant. Frankly I don't believe it will get us anywheres, but it will make the old lady feel we're on the job," Austin said, getting to his feet.

I got a car downstairs and drove Austin up to the Bronx. When we reached 3rd Avenue, I turned downtown and then East again and we were in a neighborhood of run-down wooden private houses, most of them with tiny lawns bordered by a struggling bush or even flowers. It was like a couple of blocks of some hick town set down in New York City. I pulled up before a squat two-family house, badly in need of paint and new shingles. I said, "This is it."

The Owens apartment was the bottom one and the woman who opened the door was dressed in a clean worn house dress that looked too heavy for May. She was plump, lots of veins in her fat legs, and her moon-shaped flabby face was topped with dirty gray hair braided around her head. Her eyes were red and the skin around them looked raw. Austin took off his hat as he asked, "Mrs. Edward Owens?"

"Yes, but if you're reporters I . . ."

"I'm Detective Austin and this is Detective . . . Winston."

"Wintino, David Wintino, Mrs. Owens," I told her.

We walked into the old fashioned living room. Mrs. Owens pointed to two leather chairs and we sat down. She sat on the couch, said, "I suppose you want to know about Ed." She spoke in a far away voice.

"As a police officer's wife you know we need all the information we can get to help us track down your husband's killer," Austin said like an idiot, as though he was selling something. "Do you live here alone, Mrs. Owens?"

"I do now. The Sarasohns who live upstairs have been most helpful. They did all they could for me last night. I even slept up there. My daughter Susan is down in Venezuela. She's wired she's flying up for the funeral. Our son, Edward Junior," she nodded toward the picture on the piano, "was taken from us many years ago. Now Ed . . . I just can't seem to think straight, or believe it."

"There are just a few routine questions. We're sure Mr. Owens was the victim of a nervous stick-up punk but we're not overlooking any other possibilities. Did your husband have any enemies? Was he worried?"

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"You wouldn't ask that if you'd known my Ed. He was always an easy-going man. His only troubles were financial and he never let them get him down. If anything, he was in better spirits than ever lately. A few weeks ago he came home and started dancing me around. 'Janie!' he says, 'we may have that California cottage, be raising oranges soon.' He's—was—in a gay mood all the time lately."

"About this cottage, do you think he came into some money?" I asked, although as junior man it was up to Austin to do the questioning.

"No. You see Ed had one vice, he loved to play the horses. Naturally most times he lost, but whenever he won, maybe five or ten dollars, he was like a small boy who thinks he has the world by the tail. I imagine Ed must have made himself a few dollars and was talking big. That's all it was."

Austin asked, "Is it possible Mr. Owens was playing the races big, and might have gotten in over his head with a gambling mob?"

The old lady stroked her coiled braids. "I hope I haven't given you a bad impression of Ed, he wasn't a gambler. He merely played a few dollars now and then."

"Did he drink much?"

"No sir, beer was all my Ed touched and not much of that. I never saw Edward Owens drunk except once, when sickness took our Junior. Now Al—Mr. Wales—he began to drink something frightful and Ed was always on him to stop it. That was after his dear wife died of cancer back in 1949. Al's a good man but a strange one. He never seemed too emotional about things but he went to pieces when Dora passed on. That was one reason why Ed got him to work at the brokerage house. Did Al a world of good, although he still goes off on a toot at times. Poor Al, he talked to me on the phone last night and actually cried."

"About this brokerage house, did your husband like the job? Was he happy there?"

Mrs. Owens tried to smile. "He liked the job very much."

"Why did he carry a gun?"

She looked puzzled. "My goodness, Ed's worn a gun every day for as long as I can remember. Be like asking why he wore pants."

"Now Mrs. Owens, think carefully: Was there anybody who had any reason, no matter how slight, to be angry at your husband? Or was Mr. Owens mad at anybody?"

"Not a soul."

Austin stood up." I think that's all. Thank you for your time, Mrs. Owens. And don't worry, we'll get the rats who did this."

"Yes, I suppose you will. But that won't bring Ed back to me. Every-

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place I look I see something of his, his clothes, his beers in the icebox," Mrs. Owens said, getting up.

When we were in the car Austin asked, "How long you been on the force?"

"Less than a year. So what?"

"You'll learn we haven't time to investigate every cockeyed angle to a case. Most times the commonsense angles are the right ones. Owens was held up, and by an amateur, that's the commonsense angle. Look, by this afternoon I'll be off the case and it will be left in the open files. They'll let it stand till we get a break. You want to speculate—a guy in a flying saucer might have dropped down and knocked off Owens."

"No," I said. "I'm not satisfied. I want to keep digging."

"Make sense, Winston, you can keep digging for the next three years. We haven't the time. In a few hours you'll be looking into a forced entry case, a mugging, something like that. And I'll be working on another killing."

A former cop was shot dead and everything was going on as usual, when we arrived back at headquarters.

I went up to the detective room. A quiet joker named Larson was at the desk, doing some paper work. He told me, "Dave, your wife called. Wants you to ring her at her office. Just called about ten minutes ago."

I said thanks and dialed the agency. Mary said in the low voice you have to use in a crowded office, trying not to make it sound like a whisper, "Dave? Don Tills is having two tables of bridge tonight and he's asked us over. I told you about him, one of our top copywriters, the golden boy of the office. Be a great help to me if I get in with his crowd."

"I don't mind some bridge. That all you wanted to tell me?"

"Yes and to be sure and be home on time. They're counting on us to be there at nine sharp."

"You know I always come home when I'm done here."

"Okay, we'll be normal married people. See you for supper, babes."

As I hung up, I saw Larson grinning at me as he bent over his desk. I said, "Tough for a wife to take our hours. Your wife complain much?"

"Sometimes. She's a nurse and her shifts are almost as bad as ours. But then when we do get some time together, we enjoy it more."

"Anything new?"

He shook his big head. "Quiet."

Lt. Reed came in just then. "The Owens file is on my desk. Read through it, see if you can give me a summary of the reports—before you go out to lunch."

I said, "Yes, Lieutenant," went into his office and took the file into a

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drab-looking room down the hall where we sometimes questioned suspects.

I sat down, took off my coat and went to work on the file. Most of it was the reports of the various precinct men who'd worked on the case, all the people they'd interviewed, the few leads they'd run down—everything negative. There was a copy of Owens' arrest record, almost all of the collars made with Wales. They had been hard workers, over 1600 cases. I went through the list fast, checking off those arrests where they'd used force—that would be the sort of stuff to make a joker want revenge.

Back in '37 they had 'subdued' a man named Dundus who was terrorizing a bar with a butcher knife. They must have worked the guy over good: Wales had received minor cuts and Owens had busted Dundus' nose with a sap. Dundus had been sent to Bellevue for observation and then to an institution. That was back in '37, he could have spent ten or fifteen years in a padded cell, then been released. I wondered where he was now.

There was a detailed report on the arrest of Sal Kahn for the shooting of Boots Brenner. They had roped Sal into confessing, Owens posing as a 'witness who positively identified' Sal as the man who had dumped Brenner's body in the lot. The lot was right next to an empty garage they were using for a still so I wondered why all the praise for Wales and Owens—they couldn't help but stumble on the still and the obvious solution.

Sal must have been one of these cool cats, he never gave them the name of his partner, although through stoolies he was known to be working with somebody known by the snappy title of The Bird. There was over a grand in electrical equipment in the 'shop' but Sal didn't know a thing about electricity. It was a damn good thing Kahn signed a confession—they never recovered the actual murder gun—Kahn claimed he had tossed it into a garbage can. Kahn died seventeen months later in the chair, still clam-mouthed. He had forty dollars and change on his person when arrested and not a penny was found in his room. He used a court-appointed lawyer claiming he was broke, although as Wales pointed out in one of his reports, "Kahn and his partner must have been selling a lot of alcohol to interest a gangster like Brenner. It must be assumed the missing partner fled with all the money made from the still."

I jotted down the address of the still, along with that of Kahn's sole relative, his mother, and the data on Dundus.

As I was finishing the summary, Danny Hayes came in puffing on a new cigarette.

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"Reed wants you."

I got the file together and the few notes I'd made, went through the squad room to Reed's office, told him, "There isn't much here, Lieutenant and . . ."

"Forget it, for now. Go over and see what this is all about." He shoved a slip of paper across his desk that had an address and the name Rose Henderson scrawled on it. Reed always wrote as if his pen was a barbell. "She's called in twice about being followed, men pushing her around. Sounds like some old maid crackpot."

"I'll go right over. Lieutenant, in checking Owens' arrest record you'll notice that in 1937 he and Wales brought in a nut who was flashing a big knife in a bar. They sent him away, no trial. They must have worked the guy over, Owens busted his nose while taking the knife and Wales was cut up. Name is Dundus. If he's a psycho, he could be our man, discounting the robbery angle—which I've never bought."

"This squad is off the Owens case."

"What? Why?"

"Mainly because it's a deadend. We're just going around in circles, getting no place."

"Well, I'd still like to check, see if this guy is out of the hatch, and if so, where he is and . . ."

Reed held up a large thin hand. "I'll have a check made. And forget about the Owens case . . . look . . . I like you because you never goof off. You work hard and get results, but you talk too damn much. Gowan, get going before this old maid calls up about a mouse getting into her."

I wasn't sure if Reed was smiling or not.

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON

The address Reed gave me was near the southern end of the precinct, one of these old sections where some of the houses had been remodeled, a mixture of high and low rents.

The house I wanted was a former six story tenement that had been made over into small apartments. The mailbox name plate read, Henderson-Hondura. I rang the bell and when I got an answering buzz, walked up to the third floor and rang 3C. There was one of those one-way peep hole deals and I heard it opening on the other side and a woman's voice asked, "What do you want?"

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"Are you Miss Rose Henderson?"

"Yes."

"You called the police a little while ago. I'm Detective Wintino," I said, watching my face in the peep hole and feeling like a sitting duck. My damn collar looked wilted already.

There was a long moment of hesitation, then, "Please show me your credentials." The voice was soothingly deep.

I was off the Owens case for a loony like this! I took out my buzzer and nearly shoved it through the peep mirror. "That do it, lady? My name is Dave Wintino, Detective 3rd Grade, 101st Precinct. I'm assigned to your case. Now do you think you might open the door and let me get to work?"

As I was putting my shield back in my wallet the door opened. I was off-balance: this short girl standing there with very dark close-cut hair hugging a warm and pretty face. The lips were thick and red and she wore a loose plain blue smock showing off one of these built-up from the ground solid figures, almost heavy legs. I must have been giving her bug-eyes for she glanced down at herself, then asked, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. You're a surprise. Had you pegged for an old maid crackpot."

"My, the frank policeman, this must be a new technique. You're a bit of a shock yourself, more like a college magazine salesman. Let me see that badge again, if you don't mind."

"As you wish, citizen," I said, flashing my tin. She grabbed my wrist and studied the badge for a moment, then said, "I'm sorry but I've been on the ragged edge these last few days. Please come in, Mr. . . . ?" She had a good grip.

"Wintino, David Wintino, Miss Henderson," I said, stepping by her. She was using a nice mild perfume. I thought our apartment was small but it was Madison Square Garden compared to this cell.

I sat on the couch and she curled up in the camp chair, her rear making a wonderful curve toward the polished floor. She lit a cigarette and I shook my head before she could offer me one. It was crazy, pretty as she was, I had to keep staring at her stomach: She had this tiny belly making a fat, silly curve as it filled out her dress—and why that excited me I didn't know. And why was I even thinking about *that* instead of Owens?

She said, "I do wish you'd stop inspecting me—it makes me feel as if I have two heads. Wintino? Are you of Spanish decent? You look Latin."

"I'm part Italian. Now Miss Henderson, what's your trouble?"

"Since the beginning of last week my phone has been ringing at odd

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hours of the night and either nobody answers or a man's voice goes into the most obscene sex talk. Various men have been to the Superintendent downstairs, making the most ridiculous inquiries about me. They've also been to my neighbors. I know I'm being followed on the street. In fact on Monday, Tuesday, and this morning when I went to the library—and later when I was shopping—I have been jostled by several different men," she said through the smoke of her cigarette.

The last thing she looked like was a neurotic babe. "Having any trouble with your boy-friends?"

"No, this isn't any so-called boy-friend trouble, as you put it. I know exactly why all this is being done."

"Okay, why?" I asked watching that wonderful full curve move a little every time she breathed.

"I'm a free-lance writer and at the moment working on an article for the *Spectator*—this is a weekly liberal magazine on the style of the Nation, Harper's, the Atlantic, except it deals entirely with economic subjects. My article exposes a newly formed monopoly in the electronic business. I'm certain the firms I'm writing about are trying to stop the article by making me a nervous wreck."

I got my notebook, saw my notes taken from the Owens file, said wearily, "Let me get this straight, Miss Henderson—you're doing an article for a magazine called the *Weekly Spectator* and you claim that because of this article you're being annoyed on the street and your sleep is being knocked out of wack by mysterious phone calls—and all this is being done, you think, by some of the business firms you're writing about. Is that correct?"

"Yes, this all started last week when they learned from a *Spectator* query I was writing the article."

"You were never bothered like this before?"

"Never."

"Can you give me the names of these firms?"

"Of course: Modern Electric, Wren & Co., Popular Electronics, and 20th Century Power Inc. Two weeks ago I finished working—for over three months—as a typist for Modern Electric, to confirm my material and secure data. The magazine approved an outline and last week I started my final research and a rough draft—it's a story on a revolutionary electrical device.

"Can you identify the men who've molested you as working for any of these outfits you mentioned?"

She crushed her butt with an angry gesture. "No. Are you implying this is all my imagination?"

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She walked to the closet and came back with an armful of magazines and two books with pictures of kids on them. Sitting down beside me she said, "Perhaps this will prove that I am a writer. These are two Juvenile Novels of mine that came out last year, and in these magazines you'll find some of my articles. Look."

She opened the magazines, spread them on my lap. The books were by Rose Henderson and one was called, Sweet Tooth, The Story of Pedro and the Sugar Cane Fields. Some of the articles were by Rose Hondura and a few of them were in Spanish. She pointed a very red fingernail at the magazines as she said, "That's my real name, Hondura, I'm a Puerto Rican. My father was the editor of an island Newspaper. Now here are the other articles I did for the *Spectator:* Small Farmer-Back to the Wall, and Sugar Is Far From Sweet. Here's one I sold to *Charm*—Bookkeeping for the Bride to Be. I can show you more, but does this convince you I am a writer?"

"Yes, Miss Henderson," I said politely, wishing she wasn't sitting so close—something about her sure got my water on. "You are a writer and you're doing this article about these companies. Okay. Why should they go to all this effort to stop the article?"

"It should bring Washington down on them for violating the anti-trust laws. The least it will do is force them to open up the field to others, and thus the public will benefit from the low cost."

"A bunch of small manufacturers are spending two grand a week to stop your article? Hardly seems worth all . . ."

"This bunch of small manufacturers, once they control this, they'll be in a position to drive competitors out and in time send prices sky high."

"We have to check all sides of a story. I'll report this back to my boss, Lt. Reed. We've been busy on a murder and I doubt if he can spare a man to guard you 24 hours a day. But he might put a tap on your phone, try and trace those calls. I'll let you know what we can do," I told her, getting up.

I took out an assignment slip, wrote my name and precinct phone number on it. "Next time you're pushed around on the street, if you're *sure* it was deliberate, tell the nearest cop to hold the man and have the cop call me. Show him this card."

"Thanks. I won't leave the house till I hear from you."

"Miss Henderson, the Police Department is understaffed so I can't promise we'll give you an escort, but even reporting this, having it on the precinct record, is some protection. And don't worry, we'll keep an eye on you, perhaps have the beat cop stop by now and then."

We said good-day and I walked down to the basement, keeping an

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eye out for mutts, and found the Super. He was an old mousey duck in dirty overalls and I asked, "Been any men around inquiring about Miss Henderson up in 3C?"

"You another one? I'm too busy to be answering questions all the time." He had a weak voice and some kind of mild accent.

I showed him my badge. "Detective Wintino 101st Squad."

"A cop. Say, Miss Henderson done anything crooked?"

"No. She complained about some jerks annoying her." I took out my notebook. "What's your name? How long you been employed here?"

"Heitman. Teddy's the first name. Been here going on 14 years this August. What you writing me down for, I don't want no trouble?"

"Relax, Mr. Heitman. Have you a phone here?"

"Yes sir."

"Here's my name and police phone number on this slip, keep it handy. I want you to do me a favor, phone me as soon as anybody asks about Miss Henderson. Leave your name if I'm not in and I'll call you back. Don't make a fuss about it but try to get the name of whoever asks about her, ask to see their credentials or badge, then phone me. Got that?"

"Yes sir," he said, clutching my card. "I never had no run-in with the police, never. I don't want no trouble. No sir."

"Fine," I said, walking away, knowing he was too scared to do anything. I walked up the basement steps and the humidity was like a blanket.

Back at the precinct house, Reed said, "Grab a sandwich, then finish the report on Owens and write up your case. Forget Wales. I called the Brokerage Office to check with him on that Dundus fellow. Wales hadn't shown up for work today. Must be off drowning his sorrows. Doesn't matter. I checked with the institution—Dundus died there. What's with this Henderson nut?"

"She isn't a nut. She's a writer. She's being rough-shadowed and annoyed by phone calls to make her so jittery she won't be able to finish an article exposing some electrical companies hogging a new invention. I thought she was a crackpot till I talked to the janitor—somebody has been trying to throw a scare into her."

"Has she any idea who's doing this?"

"No, but she thinks the men who jostled her must be private clowns hired by the electrical concerns. I told her we'd have the post cop and the radio car keep an eye on her house for any suspicious characters. And she wants an escort when she goes out this afternoon."

"All right, if she's a writer we don't want her knocking the Department.

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Tell her about the beat man looking in. Find out what time she'll leave her flat in the morning. I'll be able to give her a man then. It's two-twenty now, take off after you finish your paper work."

When I got Rose Henderson on the phone she blew up. "Tomorrow morning? I'm waiting *now* to go out shopping, not to mention some research I need."

"I'm sorry but we can't spare a man now. I told you that might happen. I checked with your Super, I believe your story."

"That's nice of you. I suppose I won't be killed going to the corner grocery. But I will see you tomorrow, about ten then?"

"A detective will be there by ten. He'll call you first," I said.

I came back to the squad room and started typing my reports. Reed called out from his desk, "Wintino, you know you change tours?"

"Yes sir. I report on Saturday, midnight."

Reed nodded. "Maybe we'll have a little peace and quiet around here for the next 56 hours. Finish that typing and go home and unwind."

I reached the apartment before four-thirty and took a shower and changed my shirt. I had a glass of milk and read the sport pages, wondered what Jane Owens would say if she saw our place with the high rent and all the modern furniture. What did Owens have in mind, saying he might get a California farm soon?

I got out the phone book but Al Wales didn't have a phone. I sat in a large straw and iron chair and thought of Rose Henderson curled up in her red African camp chair. Henderson-Hondura. Puerto Rican. That fine belly curve . . . interesting face. Then I thought of the party we had to go to that night—now we had to impress Mary's friends.

WEDNESDAY EVENING

This Don Tills lived down in the Village in an old brownstone that had been made over into small apartments. He had a couple of high ceilinged rooms with furniture like ours, only more of it and probably more expensive. They had nine people—there was an extra guy with a big belly and a sort of tense face, including a thick black moustache, who was sleeping off a bottle on the couch. I never did get his name or what he was doing there and nobody paid him any mind, except to break into laughter when he'd mutter, "Who's on the gate?" every ten or fifteen minutes.

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They had two bridge tables set up, with chairs to match, and all the men looked about the same, between 25 and 30, short hair cuts, casual sport clothes, sharp alert faces, and all very sure of themselves. In fact they all sounded the same, like actors talking: good voices. The girls didn't look so much alike but they had the same intense faces and all dressed sharply. There was a portable bar and everybody had a glass and they were telling jokes when we came in—mostly some old dirty jokes with new names added.

"What kind of a belt would you like Dave, Rye, Scotch, Gin, Vodka, or Tequila?" Don asked me.

I was going to say I didn't drink but didn't want to sound like a square so I said, "Too warm for hard stuff. Got a beer handy?"

Grace, Don's wife, who really filled her black and gold slacks, gave me a can of beer and a kind of bottomless cup that fitted over the top of the can. She said, "Now you won't need a glass."

I smiled.

"I wouldn't have needed a glass anyway. Thank you."

"This way the flavor of the beer isn't lost by pouring it out of the can," Don told me. Seemed like they'd given a lot of thought to something as simple as beer drinking. Then he told everybody, "Fellow I went to Yale with and who works for a Chicago agency, wrote me one of their clients is working on a paper beer container. Has some kind of keg lining to improve the flavor, I believe."

Everybody except me started talking about this: I was waiting to play bridge. Half the time I didn't even know what they were talking about. They had pet words they all liked to mouth . . . "the cost-*level*," or something was "sales-*wise*," or had a "*built-in* selling point . . ." Even Mary got into the act, saying, "There's something substantial about a can, gives you a feeling of getting your money's worth that a milk container, for example, doesn't have. Consumer-wise I think it would be a mistake to lose that."

Still they all looked like nice bright people and I sipped my beer, which only made me sweat more, and glanced at myself in a wall mirror to see if my shirt looked wilted, and listened. About a half hour later they finally got the cards out but at 9:45 somebody insisted that the TV be turned on to one of "our programs. Most boorish bilge you ever heard. We wrote several very clever programs but the client, a real cornball, chose this tripe."

The "program" was so short it wasn't worth all the talk—a one minute commercial in which an uncomfortable looking big league pitcher stumbled through a couple of lines about how he loved to use this brand of

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paint when he was puttering around his house. When it was over they shut off the set and everybody chattered away, arguing about the damn thing. I kept nursing my beer and keeping my trap shut. Belly-boy on the couch broke things up by mumbling, "Who's on the gate?" between snores and then we started to play cards.

Mary and I were playing against Don and Grace Tills. He turned out to be one of these psychic bidders, biddng on what he thinks his partner should have. He opened with a diamond bid and I was holding five diamonds, ace, queen high. His wife must have had a few, she gave him a boost. He then bid spades and she took him to game in diamonds and Don went down four.

We got good cards and Mary made three no-trump and two hands later we took the rubber. Don and his wife kept making tracks to the bar and were getting juiced. Even Mary was sailing a little and she can handle a bottle. Everybody must have been lapping it up waiting for me.

We were on the second rubber when a fellow at the other table stood up and took off his coat saying, "Does anybody mind? Getting rather warm in here."

"You ass," Don said, "You mean you stood on convention *here?* Hell, anybody feels warm, strip. And that goes for the ladies too." He took off his snappy dark grained sport coat and opened his yellow waistcoat.

Grace said something about waiting for a buy on a couple of air-conditioning units and when I was dummy I peeled off my coat. As I sat down there was a sudden silence in the room, except for light snores of the lush on the couch. There wasn't even the small noises of the cards. It was sort of a shocked silence. Mary was staring at me, her mouth angry-hard. In fact everybody was looking at me, including the four people at the other table.

I casually glanced down at my pants, at my shirt and tie—nothing was open or dirty. Mary was really burning, her face flushed. Glancing around I asked brightly, "I make a funny noise or something?"

Don pointed a slender finger at my shoulder holster and gun. "Guess this is the first time any of us have seen a set-up like that—off a TV screen. I assume that's a real gun?"

"Sure is, I'm a detective."

"Wow—a real private eye!" one of the girls at the other table said with what might have been a giggle.

Mary looked as if she wanted to disappear. "Nope, I'm a cop. Detective, 3rd grade, attached to the 101st Squad," I said.

An idiotic grin spread over Don's lean face as he dropped his cards, told Mary, "Why didn't you tell me your husband was a real detective?"

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Somebody at the other table said, "This is positively delightful," as one of the girls left the table and asked me, "May I look at your badge?"

"Sure," I said, wondering if I was being kidded. I showed her the buzzer. She touched it as if it was a big jewel. "Just a hunk of tin," I added.

They all crowded around me, I was the center of attraction for everybody except the sleeping drunk and Mary. Grace Tills pointed toward my gun, asked, "Mr. . . . Dave, why are you wearing that? Expecting some trouble here?"

"A cop is supposed to be armed at all times, off duty and on."

"Certainly the last thing you look like is a policeman," a man said, looking me over like a queer. "Have you made many arrests?"

"Whenever I have to. Like asking do you write much copy. It's my job."

Don said, "This is a novelty, talking to a real cop—on a friendly basis." He gave out a silly little laugh, as if he was nervous. "Wake up Harold."

Grace said, "Let him sleep, he's so coy when he's loaded." She turned to Mary. "You should have brought Dave over long before this. He's terribly interesting."

Mary's face was back to normal color but her mouth was still a tight line. Then she said, "Dave is the youngest detective on the force. He made a very important arrest a few months ago—you remember that psychopath who had killed several women with a piece of pipe? Dave arrested him and was made a detective." Her voice wasn't shrill, she probably felt better now that I was the center of things.

One of the men said, "I followed that case. I get a morbid kick out of reading . . . That's right, I do recall now, a rookie cop named Wintino. Never connected that—him—with you, Mary. But I should have, odd name."

The girl who had wanted to see my badge asked, "Tell us the truth, is there really much third degreeing?"

I dropped my cards and shrugged. "I've seen very little of it. But then I haven't been on the force long. There's over 20,000 men on the force, I suppose there must be more than a few knuckle-happy cops. And sometimes it can't be helped."

"Surely you don't condone such methods?"

"Well," I said slowly, patting my hair—I always get condone and condemn mixed up in my mind, "It's like this: we have a lot of laws, many of them stupid and far outdated, but they're still on the books. The more laws the more law breakers, more work for us. And we're always running short on time. Now most crooks are cowards, at least that's what the older cops tell me. These crooks because they are cow-

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ards deal in violence and sometimes that same violence, or the threat of it, is the fastest way of making them talk. From my own experience I'd say there's little rough stuff, mostly because it isn't necessary."

"Now look here, Dave," Don said, freshening his drink, "We all know there's police brutality, you might as well admit it."

"There probably are cops who think with their night sticks," I said, "But as I said, from my own experience, I've seen some impatient cops, but that's all. I wouldn't call it brutality."

"Who's on the gate?" the clown on the couch asked but now nobody laughed, they were paying attention only to me.

"How about corruption?" another guy asked me.

I smiled. "Come off it."

"I'm serious. I've read the reports of the Seabury Investigation some twenty years ago and that definitely showed . . ."

"That was long before my time. I can assure you I'm not the captain's bagman, nor have I ever seen such a collector. Sure, there's small cushion some guys go for—a free meal, a few bucks at Christmas, maybe a new tie or hat. And for all I know there may be big payoffs from the rackets, but I've never seen it. A retired cop was shot yesterday while working as a part-time messenger, does that sound like a guy with a hand in the cracker barrel?"

"Now we all read about traffic ticket scandals, the business with Harry Gross," the guy said.

I tried not to get sore. "You want me to give you newspaper stories or what I know? Let me put it this way. In the short time I've been a working police officer, I haven't even been offered a free sandwich. And if I had, I wouldn't have taken it. Hell, there must be some people in the advertising office who are always looking for free theatre tickets or a bottle, that doesn't make the whole agency corrupt. Most of the cops I know have a job to do, protecting society, and they try to do it best they can."

Mary was giving me the eye—maybe to shut up.

"Are you really protecting society?" Don asked. "Nobody can solve social problems, deep and complex, merely by passing a law. Crime is but the reflection of the sick state of our society and at best a policeman is only a salve when an operation is needed."

I said, "A salve is better than nothing."

"Dave, nobody is interested," Mary said, her voice a shade on the shrill side.

"Oh, but indeed we are," Grace Tills said with a big smile for me. "This is all so wonderful."

"A cop can't be judge and jury, that's when he goes in for rough stuff.

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It's only a job to me," I said.

"Come now, Dave," the girl who liked my badge said, studying me with what she must have thought were big eyes, "You can't separate yourself from society by just saying 'it's my job,' or 'my duty.' Those are false labels."

"It's more than a job in the sense that I'm doing good by preventing other crimes. I mean if there weren't any cops, well you know. But it's also strictly for pork chops with me, and with you. Suppose you're pushing some towel ads. You never ask whether the cotton was picked by underpaid migrant workers made in a sweatshop mill, when you sit in your comfortable office and lay out a slick ad," I said, knowing I wasn't saying what I wanted to or making much sense.

"A philosophical cop," one of the men said. "Wonder of wonders."

"No it isn't a wonder or philosophical or a damn thing but a job with long hours and . . ."

"Little pay," Mary cut in bitterly.

"And big risks," I said. "If your boss suddenly told you to get out and clean the office windows you'd refuse because you'd be risking your life. Yet for less salary than you're making I'm expected to face guns, knives, and fists every day. But even if the pay was good it wouldn't make it a good job because secretly most people hate cops."

"Exactly," the girl with the big eyes said. "Because you do society's dirty work. These men you arrest, their resentment isn't against the economic insecurity that makes them seek robbery, but against you. We need economic equality not night sticks or . . ."

"Easy Janice," Grace Tills cut in, "Or you'll fall off your soap-box."

"No, no," Janice said eagerly, "I'm only trying to show him the reality of the situation is that police aren't the answer but . . ."

"The reality of the situation is," I cut in, "that there's a homicide every forty minutes in the U. S. A., a rape every half hour, an assault every six minutes, and some form of larceny every twenty-six seconds, and when you're the victim you'll be yelling for the police!"

"Lord," Don said, "Are those facts?"

"Of course they are, I know my job," I told him.

"Sounds fantastic," this Janice began, "but that proves what I . . ."

Grace Tills put her fingers in her mouth and whistled. She could whistle real good. She held up her hands. "I think it's time we took Dave off the witness stand. Cards anybody?"

"Almost eleven," a girl who hadn't said anything before said, "Let's stick to drinking. We have to be home by midnight or our Cinderella baby-sitter will sack us."

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They all trooped to the bar except me—I just don't like the taste of beer. Janice hurried back with a drink in her right hand and pointed her left at my holster as she said, "It's like being near a snake, same morbid attraction."

"Not good to get too near guns or snakes," I kidded her, watching Mary down a quickie at the bar.

We played a few rubbers and they all talked, their Madison Avenue small talk, with me feeling restless and thinking of the case. Some time later someone put on TV and we watched film shots of the day's news —then the smooth voice of the commentator was saying, ". . . and in this dingy room his landlady found Wales' body when he failed to answer her repeated knocks. Police say the retired detective was killed around noon although the landlady didn't discover the body until late this afternoon. One puzzling aspect of the case was a large amount of cash in the dead man's money belt which was untouched. Now, after a word from my sponsor, I'll have the late sport results and the weather for . . ." I was startled out of my numbed thoughts—and glad to be moving again.

As I put on my coat I told Mary, "I have to get back to the precinct house. Want me to take you home first?"

"Don't worry about me: I'll go home when I'm ready!" she snapped, angrily.

"Babes, I have to . . ."

Don said, "Aren't you being rather melodramatic, Dave old man? Hear about a murder on TV and go dashing out into the night. You really have to go?"

"Melodramatic?" I repeated. "This isn't any play—Wales's partner was killed yesterday and I was on the case. Goodnight everybody."

Mary ran after me to the door. I asked, "Got cab fare, babes?"

"We can't even have a decent evening out . . ." Mary said. She was on the verge of crying but held it in. "Just leave me alone!" She turned back toward the others and I walked out.

I walked around the corner and found myself at a subway entrance. Riding up to the station house I thought: My hunch was the only correct one—somebody was out to get both men and that could only mean a collar they'd made, perhaps the killer did a long stretch and just got out. How else could ex-cops make enemies? Instead of horsing around with the Henderson case, if Reed had let me talk to Wales when I asked, the old guy would still be alive now, probably helping me solve the Owens killing.

There were only two men in the detective squad room, Wilson and the man who was the senior detective on the squad and in charge when

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Reed wasn't around. He was Tom Landon, the quiet type who always looks bored and never gets excited. He asked, "Got your tours mixed, Dave? What you doing here?"

"Heard on TV about Al Wales being killed."

"Yeah, quite a thing. Eleven thousand bucks in a money belt wrapped around his gut. Shame a man has to kick the bucket with that kind of dough unspent."

"Where's everybody? Where's Lt. Reed?"

Landon leaned back in his chair and ran dental floss through his phoney teeth, he was always playing with those false choppers. "Home, I guess. Why?"

"I thought with this Wales shooting, I mean it proves Owens wasn't in any stick-up, he was deliberately gunned . . . figured we'd all be working tonight."

Landon said, "And you dropped everything and came a-running. Dave, why don't you grow up and stop playing cops and robbers?"

"But I had a hunch on Owens all along and if I'd seen Wales today, like I wanted to . . ."

Landon shook his little head. "Don't take your job home with you, Dave. Leave it in your locker with your walking shoes. What are you made of, Dave? You have two days off, take your wife to the movies, get high . . . young fellow like you should be in bed a lot. And never come a-running, they'll get you out of bed often enough. All an eager-beaver gets is tired."

I waited a second before I asked, "Be okay if I do some looking around on my own—on my off days?"

"It's your time, wear your nose down to the bone. Look, Dave, I'm not eating you out. Sure, look around if you like, only take it easy, don't get in the hair of those super sleuths downtown, the glory-hounds."

I started for the door, stopped. "What's the latest dope on Wales?"

"He was shot with a .22 through the right eye, at short range. Whole side of his face has flash burns, must have used a silencer. There were two other men in the rooming house at the time, one asleep, one reading in bed—both say they didn't hear a thing. Wales hadn't been to work today so he must have been sleeping off a drunk when he got it. Medical Examiner places it around noon. Nothing was touched. Wales was fully dressed, probably passed out in bed. Maybe the killer didn't know about the money belt and the eleven grand. So far, no leads, no prints—nothing. Now go home and let me finish up."

"I suppose they're checking the arrest record and . . ."

"Central Office boys know their business."

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"Hell of a way for a couple of good cops to end," I said, making for the door.

Landon nodded. "Wales was especially good. This isn't out yet, so keep it damn quiet, Dave. They found a .38 Smith & Wesson that belonged to Wales in his room. Ballistics says it's the gun that killed Owens."

THURSDAY MORNING

We had a rough night. Mary came home half-bagged, which didn't help my mood.

I couldn't even keep up with her arguments, most of my mind was busy trying to figure why Al Wales shot his partner. After awhile Mary fell off and I stared at the darkness and nothing made sense. Wales had said a crime was like an iceberg—this one was sure hidden, needed a lot of spade work. Two old coots, friends and partners for nearly a quarter of a century and when they're both hanging around, taking it easy before they die, one kills the other. And Al Wales, dressing like he was warming the buffalo on a nickel and eleven grand in his kick. I went to sleep full of questions—and not a single answer.

Mary was up at eight and I didn't get up to have breakfast with her, stayed in bed and thought about a cop killing his partner. What would Danny Hayes have to do for me to kill him? When Mary took off I got up and made the bed back into a couch, had some orange juice. I felt lousy, restless and blue. For no reason I decided to do some roadwork. I walked over to Central Park and trotted around the reservoir, throwing punches like a pug. Then I suddenly stopped—what the hell was I training for? I was on my own these two days, and could devote all my time to the case. I walked over to Central Park West and took a subway to Brooklyn. I had two addresses I wanted to check.

The first was out in the Fort Hamilton section and I walked past rows of old two-storey private houses that reminded me of the Owens dump, till I stopped before a shingle house with a tiny garden and a busted picket fence in front. A frightful biddy answered the door. Her thin, frizzled hair was too red and the powder on her puss seemed to accent the wrinkles. She had two flashy rings on her fingers and a thin marriage band. Didn't seem possible a guy had ever married this bag. She said, "Yes sonny?" and smiled.

"Can you tell me where I can find a Mrs. Kahn?"

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She shrieked, "Martha Kahn? The Lord rest her soul, she's been at peace six years now. You related?"

"Yeah, a distant cousin. I'm in New York for a few days with . . . uh . . . our school basketball team. Thought I'd look the family up."

"And you didn't know Martha was dead? Why . . ." The over-red mouth clamped down. "You from the California branch of the family?"

"No ma'm, from the Michigan branch."

"That's good. When I bought this house from Martha just before she died, while she was so sick, I kept writing them in California to send some one here to look after the old woman. Not a peep out of them. But don't you know soon as she died they had a lawyer here Johnny-on-the-spot claiming the estate. And them acting so snooty to Martha just because of that old trouble."

"You mean about Uncle Sal?" I asked carefully.

"Indeed I do. Like I kept telling poor Martha, what that had to do with her I couldn't see. But those smug sisters of hers out in Los Angeles —well!"

"Of course Uncle Sal was before my time and I'm a distant relation, but I remember hearing about him. Went to jail, didn't he?"

"Died in the electric chair he did!" the biddy said, her voice full of enjoyment at finding a new listener for old gossip. "Got his-self in trouble during prohibition."

"I'm not up much on this line of the family, are there any other members around here?"

"They all in California, well off I hear, but wouldn't ever send Martha a Christmas card or nothing, on account of Sal's trouble."

"If she owned this fine house she must have been comfortable."

The gash opened wide. "Hummp! First of every month, regular as the calendar, there was a registered letter with two hundred dollars—always ten $20 bills. I know, the last few months when the poor woman was confined to her bed and only had me to look after her, she opened the letters and I saw the money. But she never would tell me who it was from."

"Maybe from California?"

"In a pig's . . . eye! I did notice the return addresses on the last two letters being I had to sign for them. Different names and addresses and both of them phoney. Yes sir, I was such a decent friend to poor Martha I went over to each address, figuring might be a relation who could look after Martha. First time wasn't no such street number, next time wasn't no such party. I asked Martha and she says she had no idea who did send her the money, it just came regular for years."

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"Sounds strange, you'd think she'd know who sent her money," I said.

Baggy nodded. "Ask me, she once told me Sal had a partner in his business but Sal didn't see no sense involving him in this trouble. Ask me, I'd bet this here partner maybe agreed to look after Martha if Sal didn't talk. Yes, sir."

"Didn't Aunt Martha know who this partner was?"

"Said she never knew."

"The letters stop when Aunt Martha died?"

"Sure, soon as the postman returned the next one as deceased they stopped."

"Can you recall the two false names and addresses you mentioned? Or the name of Aunt Martha's doctor?"

"Now that was over six years ago and . . . Say, you ask a lot of questions for a kid." The clown mouth became a rough, heavy line as she stepped back and slammed the door, shouting, "I bet a fat dollar you're the son of one of them California bitches! Scoot before I take a broom to you!"

I walked back toward the subway, stopped for a cup of coffee and toast, picked up a paper and read about Wales. He made the fifth page. There was a picture of him and Owens, taken years ago, and nothing I didn't know in the news story. I had a second cup of java and a hunk of pie which was pretty good.

The other address was the garage where Sal ran his still, where he killed Boots Brenner in 1930. This was in another part of Brooklyn and traveling in Brooklyn is like going over a giant obstacle course.

I asked a patrolman for directions.

"You aren't three blocks from it. Dye plant. On my beat when I'm working radio car. Good people at Christmas."

"Dye plant? Was it ever a garage?"

"I been in this precinct for five years and it's been a dye plant all that time. New building. I think before that it was an empty lot and a ruin. Seems to me I heard a kid was hurt playing in the old building years ago and they had to put a watchman in. An old duffer in the neighborhood. Still works as a night watchman for the dye company. Old George Davis. He might be able to tell you about it being a garage. Anything important?"

"Naw, checking a reference. Where's this Davis fellows?"

"When you get to the dye plant keep going a block. You'll see an old brown house that looks like a good wind would carry it away. Can't miss it; same side of the street. Old George lives there. Be working in his garden now. Doesn't hit the sack till noon."

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The dye plant was one of these one-storey efficient looking buildings, all spic and span. It had glass-brick windows and air conditioning, looked like a big outfit.

A broken walk around the old brown house led to a large garden. A plump old gent with a fat nose and a shabby derby on a lot of gray hair, was digging up the ground with a pitchfork. He had on a worn flannel shirt and his old work pants were held up by wide fireman's suspenders. He was stinking up the sunshine with a battered pipe.

"Mr. Davis?"

He nodded.

I showed my badge as I told him, "Detective Dave Wintino, 101st Squad. If you can spare a few minutes I'd like to chat with you."

"I got plenty of time," he said. His voice had a kind of whine you find in lots of big old men.

"You remember when the dye plant was an empty garage and a vacant lot? Were you around when they had the shooting in the lot?"

He patted his crazy hat. "Sure was. I mean I wasn't at the actual shooting or when they found the body, but I was there when the cops were. Now that was way back in 19 . . ."

"1930."

He nodded. "Yep and times was real bad. Garage had been standing empty maybe two-three years when one day I seen two men working in it. Never knew exactly what they was doing, all very quiet. So didn't surprise me none when it turned out they was bootlegging. Sometimes when I'd be working my tomatoes in the lot on Sundays, or late in the afternoons, I'd see them. The one they killed in prison and the other."

"The other—what did he look like?"

Davis relit his pipe before he said, "One thing I got to hand you cop fellows, you never give up. Like I told that other detective, it's been a . . ."

"What other detective?"

"Tall one that was handling the case. Even after they give the fellow the chair and the garage was just an old building with busted windows —them darn kids around here—why every now and then this dick would still come around and look through the building. Although there wasn't anything to see that I knew of."

"Was the detective named Owens or Wales?"

"Hard to say. I'm not much on names."

I opened the paper to the story on Wales' death, showed him the two pictures. He touched Wales' photo with his pipe. "That's him. He

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used to talk to me a good deal, at first. Kept asking, like you just did, what this other bootlegger looked like, the one they never did catch up with. Like I say, they was pretty quiet about what they was doing, so I only saw him maybe a few times. Slim young fellow with dark hair and a thin moustache. Always wearing sun glasses, even when it was a dull day. Of course, I ain't so sure of this now—it was 26 years ago."

"Yeah, too long ago," I said, trying to think. "How often did Wales come out to look at the garage, or watch it?"

Davis shifted his feet on the pitchfork. "Hard to say. After a time, a few years, we didn't talk much, just nod at the other. Sometimes he'd ask if I'd seen anybody around searching the place. I never did. That was right before the war when a kid fell through the rotten floor and got hurt. They took me on as watchman to keep the brats out."

"Wait a minute," I cut in. "Before the war. You mean Wales was still snooping around here in 1941, almost a dozen years after the killing?"

"Yep, he was around up till the time they tore it down."

"Can you recall when he gave up?"

"Just about. It was early in '46, say around April. I remember because I told him about the building coming down and he slipped me a few bucks, says I should go to the movies, take the day off. He said he'd be there all day. Around six in the evening I came back and he says, 'Now they can knock this wreck down. I'm done'. I says to him, 'You find what you been looking for?' And he gave me a blank look and asks, 'Who says I was looking for anything?' One thing, he wasn't carrying a package or anything when he left."

"He could have put a bag in his car while you were in the sack."

"Nope, he didn't have his car that day. Didn't see the paper today, what's this Wales done now?"

"He was shot to death. Pops, did you ever see the other man, this Owens, poking around here? He was a detective too."

"No, just Wales. Don't recall the other face. 'Course at the time of the shooting, whole block was full of detectives."

"I want you to do me a favor, don't talk about this. Don't even tell anybody you remember Wales. You see what you've just told me can be nothing, then again it might help us solve Wales' murder."

"I won't say a mumbling word. Don't want to get mixed up in nothing. Not me. Say, I sure got to read the morning paper now."

I wrote my name and the squad phone on a notebook page, gave it to him. "If you think of anything else, even if it doesn't seem important, but anyway you haven't told me—*anything*—give me a ring. If I'm not there, leave a number where I can reach you. Got a phone?"

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"I only room here, with my grandson, but they got a phone. And you can call me at the dye plant all during the night. I'll think about it, maybe I can recall something. But it was a long time ago."

On the subway ride back to the apartment I felt swell. I had a lot of pieces that would fit into one picture damn soon. And then Landon and Reed and the rest of the squad would know who was a snot-nosed kid.

I got home before noon and had some eggs and went over my notes—still thought of seeing Wales' room.

The gun had never been found in the Brenner killing, was that what Wales was looking for? But why keep looking for it 16 years after the shooting? And when he did find it—what? There had been nothing in the arrest record about finding the gun. Did he think the rod might convict Kahn's missing partner, this Bird? Or was Al Wales hunting because he felt Kahn was innocent? But then why keep looking years after Kahn burnt?

It didn't have to be the gun—buried money wasn't a bad angle. Brenner wouldn't have muscled in unless there was plenty of loot, and that would account for the dough Wales had on him. But Wales was a good cop and would have reported the money if . . . A good cop who shot down his partner!

The thing to do was let what I had jell, maybe dig deeper into Sal Kahn's past. I had the feeling my hunch was hot and in time . . . The phone rang.

I picked it up. "Mr. David Wintino?" It was a woman's voice and vaguely familiar.

"Talking."

"This is Rose Henderson. Hope you don't mind my calling you at home. I looked you up in the book."

"I don't mind. What's up?"

"I waited and then phoned your Police Station twice for an escort. They tell me they can't spare a man today."

"They're very busy."

"But this will mean the second day I've lost. That's exactly what *they* want. If I miss my deadline, the article might be postponed for months. You promised I'd have an escort today and now you . . ."

"Have any trouble since yesterday?" I asked.

"Yes, there was a phone call at 4:20 A.M. No answer when I picked up the receiver. This is driving me to a breakdown. I feel like a prisoner. All I need is a few more days of research and I could wind things up. You told me I'd have . . ."

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"Listen to me carefully. It's seven after twelve. I'll be in front of your house at one. Where did you plan to go this afternoon?"

"To the 42nd Street Library."

"Okay. Exactly at one leave your house. Walk over to Broadway and down to the IRT subway. Get off at Times Square and walk toward the Library. Keep on the downtown side of the street. I'll be following you but don't ever look for me—that would tip them off. Even if you're pushed around, unless it's real trouble, I won't step in. Idea is I want to see whoever is shadowing you. Remember, don't act self-conscious and don't look around for me. If you should see me, act as if you don't know me. Got that?"

"I think so. One sharp . . . IRT . . . downtown side of the street."

"You stay an hour, at exactly two you leave, side entrance, and wait at home till I either call or drop in. That may not be for a brace of hours. We all set? One o'clock on the nose."

"Yes Dave. And thank you."

I took a fast cold shower and dressed and took off.

I wanted to see Rose again.

THURSDAY AFTERNOON

Exactly at one, she came out of her house. I watched the doorways, the parked cars, but couldn't make out anybody shadowing her as she slowly walked toward Broadway. I stayed a half block behind and on the other side of the street.

We walked along 42nd Street on opposite sides of the street. Alongside Bryant Park they got her. There was a tall wiry guy who fell in behind her—did it fast, then slowed down.

Coming towards her was a lumpy joker built like a fat football player, who seemed to be reading a letter. They were damn good. The guy back of Rose closed in and Lumpy—in front of her—walked into Rose. He knocked her backwards against Wiry who neatly hit the folder and pocketbook out from under her arm as he caught her. The papers and the pocketbook landed in the gutter.

Beefy boy was all apologies while Wiry pointed to his ankle, rubbed it, and said something to Rose—probably told her to watch where she was walking.

I'd read about rough-shadowing, but this was the first time I'd ever

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seen it. A 250 pound lump walking into you is a rugged wallop. Rose seemed shaken but not hurt. She continued on to the Library while Lumpy went over toward Broadway. I followed him wishing I'd had Danny with me to tail the wiry joker. But if I'd called Danny on his day off, he would have given me a stiff ha-ha.

Bully boy took his time walking up Broadway, window-shopping in a couple of *shlock* stores, stopping for an orange drink. He turned into an office building and we both went into the same elevator. The light panel said there were 16 floors. When he called out, "Ten," I said, "Eleven."

I walked downstairs to the 10th floor and looked around. There were fourteen offices on the floor but fortunately a big rug outfit took up six doors. I narrowed it down to three offices, two of them without names on the doors, and one with DATA, INC., in small black letters.

I walked into DATA, INC., ready to give them a bull yarn if I was wrong. It was quite an office. I wasn't wrong.

Bully was hanging up the receiver and he stood up as he asked, "What you want, boy?"

I spread my feet as he stepped towards me, met him with a perfect left hook above his belt buckle. He let out a gasping, hissing scream as he slid to the floor, gave up the orange drink. The wiry character came out of his office on the run, coat off. He led a sucker right: it was a feint and his left banged the side of my face. I missed a left to his gut because his blow knocked me backwards, but I blocked another right and kicked him on the knee. He cursed, limped back till he hit a chair, sat down, rubbing his leg.

The side of my face was numb and when I took my hand away it had blood—the smart bastard was wearing a heavy ring. Fatso was still moaning on the floor. I stepped away from his big feet as Wiry gave me a hard look, said, "You're in trouble kid, I'm a detective. My name is Frank Flatts and I'm a licensed and bonded private investigator. I'm asking you to identify yourself."

"Detective David Wintino, 101st Squad. That okay, investigator? Tell lard-ass to get up slowly and behave himself."

"I'd like to see your badge."

"Sure." I held my coat open and he copied down my number on a phone pad, along with my name.

"I'm within my legal right in asking for identification," Flatts said. "Is this an arrest?"

"You certainly are within your legal rights. And deliberately jostling

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a person might be within your rights too—except it's breaking the Penal Law."

Flatts grinned, maybe he was relieved. He said, "So that's it. Sorry I bruised you, Wintino, but you came busting into my office, and . . ."

"My story is I was pushed before I had a chance to say a word. Baldy is good at pushing."

"This is my associate, Mr. Tasman. I think we should get down to cases. I have a busy afternoon ahead of me."

"More women to jostle?" I asked.

"If you are referring to the young woman, that was an accident. I don't go in for rough stuff. We are essentially a business service. Our work is in the nature of research, we supply business men with information about their competitors. And we use the most advanced scientific methods. Electronics has replaced the gun, the . . ."

"That was some very respectable rough-shadowing you did out there," I reminded him.

"Let me also enlighten you about the law. Section 7228 of the Penal Law was passed against pickpockets and specifically defines jostling as a crime only if it is done for the purpose of picking a pocket or purse. As for the young lady, we never saw her before she walked into me. I assumed it was an accident on her . . ."

Tasman suddenly spoke up, grunted, "Don't you know she's a Spic, her real name is Hondura?"

"I don't like my friends called Spics. And for a girl you claim you never saw before you certainly know a lot about her." I stood up. "Let's stop the chatter. This isn't an official visit, although Miss Henderson has made a complaint with the precinct. If you annoy her once more I'll return and run you both in for disorderly conduct and/or jostling—let a judge determine the law."

"Are *you* threatening me, Wintino?" Flatts called out.

"Yeah. I'm telling you both to stop it or I'll work you over."

Flatts cupped one ear. "What did you say?"

"That I'll beat the slop out of you if you keep annoying Miss Henderson. Did you hear that or do you want a free sample?"

I turned toward him and he flicked his hand at the desk, must have turned on a switch, that cold smile engraved on his wise-guy face. The office was suddenly filled with a playback of our conversation. I was astonished at how shrill my voice sounded. I said loudly, over the recording, "It still goes. You'll be listening to that in a hospital!"

I headed for the door again as Flatts cut the playback, said, "I trust you have strong arches, Wintino. I have influential friends."

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I was so angry I couldn't think straight—falling for a clumsy feint like that. It wasn't two yet so I took the subway down to the golden domed monstrosity they call Headquarters Building, went up to Criminal Identification and got a yellow sheet on Sal Kahn. He didn't have much of a record. Collared in a raid on a dice joint in '26 and spent two months on Rikers Island. He'd been pinched once for simple assault, charge dismissed for lack of evidence. In '29 he'd been picked up as the owner of a speedboat riddled during a rum-running chase up the Hudson, but never came up for trial. Of course the last rap was the shooting in 1930.

This Flatts guy had made me restless—I had a feeling he might be able to put me back in uniform. My big mouth and that tape recording. Wales said I talked too much.

Wales—I had started out in the morning like a ball of fire and that had petered out. His watching the garage all those years had to mean something but I was stopped. Now if I could really shakedown his room, talk to everybody in the rooming house, I might locate some lead. Fat chance of downtown letting me stick my nose in. Hell, maybe they hadn't even gone through Owens' house yet. Nuts, who was I to tell Central Bureau how to work? I'd really be acting like a kid.

I took the subway uptown and rang Rose's bell. After giving me the eye through the door-peeper, she let me in. She was wearing a kind of purple cotton slack outfit that could have passed for pajamas. As always she gave me the feeling of a firecracker waiting for a match. We both sat on the couch and she asked if I'd seen what had happened and I told her about following the guy to Data, Inc., and that I thought she wouldn't be bothered anymore. The couch was comfortable and I thought it was nice of Rose to dress for me, wear this faint perfume. And suddenly I felt very tired; all that silly roadwork, rushing around Brooklyn, then running downtown. And my head was tired from worrying so much. I wanted to stop thinking for awhile.

Rose said, "I can't tell you how much I appreciate this. I don't know why I called you at home. But I was so angry and when they said you weren't at the Police Station, why I . . ."

"This is my day off," I said, closing my eyes. Her perfume made Rose seem very close.

"Oh I'm sorry. Why didn't you tell me? I never would have asked you to work."

"Doesn't matter, I was stewing around the house anyway, wanted to get out," I said, half-aloud. "Getting so I can't stand our place. My wife is always hitting on me. She doesn't like my being a cop."

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"She must be afraid you'll get hurt."

"Guess that's part of it. But she doesn't like the hours, the pay, the kind of work. She wants me to have some hot-air office job. What she doesn't understand is my job has a kind of purpose and value no other job has. Even the cop just standing on the corner is doing something, a symbol, a warning. But maybe she's right, it hasn't a big future. She still thinks if you work hard you get ahead, make the big buck."

Rose laughed. "And as the old joke goes, marry the boss' daughter."

I tried to nod but it was too much effort. "In my case I've already married the boss' niece. Her uncle has some crummy job for me in his joint. The thing is, Mary and me, we can't even talk about it without clawing. I don't know . . ." I kept mumbling on and on, sitting there with my head against the wall in a daydream, telling Rose about how I met Mary, her family, and all the rest of it. Must have been something I'd wanted to get off my chest, I talked and talked.

The next thing I knew, she was shaking me gently. I sat up and opened my eyes. She was giving me the big eyes, an almost sad smile on her cute face. "Would you like something to drink?"

I shook my head and yawned, reached up to straighten my hair. "Heat must have me. Have I been dozing long?" My coat was wrinkled.

"About ten minutes. I have some chilled wine, beer, or would you rather have orange juice?"

"Orange juice will do the trick. I feel like a slob, spilling my troubles all over you."

She went to her tiny refrigerator and poured two glasses of juice, squeezed a lime in them. "I don't mind. As a writer I'm curious about such problems . . . the truth is we all actually enjoy hearing the other person's troubles. That enjoyment is the root of all gossip. I wish I could help you, could give you advice, but I'm hardly the one."

Handing me a glass she sat down again. I said, "I didn't mean to talk about it. Slipped out."

"I'm not married, never have been, yet I can't understand what you told me. I suppose I have naive and romantic ideas about marriage, but for me a husband and a wife should be a separate little world of their own. Nothing on the outside should be able to touch that world. I'm not that simple I don't know poverty can shatter anything, but aside from real poverty, I can't picture anything penetrating this inner world of understanding. But to start with, it has to be two sides, a complete sense of give and take."

I drank most of the juice, it was cold and the lime hit me like a shot, woke me up. "I think I get what you mean. And at times I tell myself

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I am inconsiderate, but then so is she. All boils down to my job. Maybe she's right about it not being the best job in the world for me, maybe I would be a whiz-bang at something else. But still, it's *my* job, it's the only thing I know and I like it. That's what she can't understand. It's more than a job to me, it's something I like."

We had chatted on so—it was very pleasant. Thinking about Mary, I asked, "Rose, would *you* care if *your* husband was a cop?"

She shook her head and leaned against the wall. "I wouldn't like him to."

"Why?"

She was looking at me through half-shut eyes as she said, "I wouldn't want my husband to be a hunter of men, a walking club, but if that is what he honestly wants and feels, well . . . there's that wonderful saying about we all can't be in step and each of us must march to the music he hears."

"What makes you think cops are walking clubs?" I asked, getting up.

She stood up and smiled at me. "I don't want to argue with you. You have been so very nice to me—I honestly do appreciate all you've done for me, David."

"I told those Data jerks I was acting as a friend, not as a cop. That's true—and don't think I'm making a pass—we are friends," I said, thinking how much I would like to make a pass at her.

"Thank you. I hope we will always be friends, but . . . David, life is simple for you but for me, raised in a colony—even though I was fortunate enough to be island-rich—I'm full of deep frustrations and hatreds and . . . God, don't let me get started on that. Yes, we can be friends, I know."

"Okay. My first friendly act will be to shove off. I'll keep in touch with you, Rose and if you have any more trouble, call me at once."

"All right. Thank you again, my friend."

We shook hands at the door. Downstairs I started walking toward the precinct house. It was only a few blocks away and I wanted to get the latest dope on Wales, tell Reed the stuff I'd dug up in Brooklyn. I'd made this big speech about what a swell deal it was being a cop and for all I knew, if these Data clowns had pull, I could be on my way out as of now. Bet Mary would love it if I *had* to come to Uncle Frank. And Rose, a bundle of fire living alone maybe waiting for . . .

"Hey junior."

I turned to see a squad car at the curb, Landon and Wilson grinning at me. I didn't realize it was after four already. Walking over, I asked, "What's the action?"

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"Nothing too much. What happened to your face?"

"Nicked myself while shaving. Anything on Wales new?"

Landon shook his head. "What you shave with, a broken bottle?"

"You mean there's another way to shave? What's on Wales?"

"Nothing new that I've heard of. Seems to be one of those tough ones, no witnesses, just a lot of nothing. Reed's been calling your house."

I turned and asked Landon. "Know what Reed wants?"

"Something to do with Mrs. Owens. We'll drive you to the precinct."

"I'll phone him, if he's still there," I said.

"He's there," Landon assured me, giving Wilson the nod to drive on.

I phoned Reed from a drugstore, told him, "This is Dave Wintino, Lieutenant. Landon says you've been calling my house. Sorry I wasn't there. I've been out . . ."

"What's to be sorry about? You're off duty, you can be any place you want. Mrs. Owens called, said she wants you to call her."

"Me?"

"That's what she said. Must be something personal. Dave, if you speak to her, don't say anything about Wales' gun having killed her husband. Central Office Bureau hasn't let that out yet. Landon said he told you."

"I understand. Lieutenant, on the Owens-Wales murders, I was out in Brooklyn and I think if we dig into the Sal Kahn murder rap, we'll find that . . ."

"Dave," Reed cut in, his voice tired, "Central has the best men on the force, they say so themselves. This is their wagon and they'll know how to pull it, without any free advice."

"Yes, sir."

"Just be careful what you tell Mrs. Owens."

"Yes, sir." I damn near slammed the receiver through the phone. I dialed Mrs. Owens.

Her daughter answered the phone.

"Oh yes, Ma wants to see you. It's . . . uh . . . rather personal and important. Could you come up to our place, Mr. Wintino, now?"

I glanced at my watch: Four-fifty. "Well, I'm due home for supper. Let me check with my wife and call you back," I told her, angry again—thinking I must sound like the henpecked husband.

"We'd appreciate it if you could drop over soon as possible. Any time this afternoon or tonight you can make it."

"I'll call you back."

We hung up and I dialed Mary's office, knowing I'd get hell. Still,

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if I got to the Owens' house right away, I might be able to be home by six-thirty or seven. Soon as Mary got on the phone she asked, "Where have you been all afternoon? I've called the house at least a half a dozen times."

"Out checking a few things."

"I'm glad you called. Dave, I have to type up the minutes of a big sales conference. I won't be home till nine. There's enough in the box for your supper."

"I'll manage. Mean you got stuck on your job too?"

"Indeed I do," Mary said in an over-sweet voice. "But I get time and a half for it and two dollars for supper money. Drop that in the suggestion box—if your wonderful Police Department has such a thing."

"See you at nine."

She hung up and I counted my change. All the fares and phoning left me with seventy cents. I could go up to the station and maybe borrow a buck, along with a lot of ribbing.

Instead of calling Mrs. Owens back, I walked six blocks to the crosstown bus and rode over to the Bronx, then up 3rd Avenue and walked to their house. It was almost six when I rang their bell. A tall young woman wearing corny black and gold toreador pants that proved she had thin legs, and an interesting suede beach jacket, opened the door.

I said, "I'm Dave Wintino, Miss Owens."

"Oh—I thought you were going to call. Well, must be making detectives from a different mold this season. Come on in. Ma, your detective is here."

I grinned at that 'your detective' as I followed her into the living room and those long legs sure took big steps. There was a pigskin overnighter covered with plane stickers against one wall. Mrs. Owens' moon face looked a little tense as she came in from the kitchen, drying her hands on her apron. "Mr. Wintino, I hope we didn't put you to no trouble by . . . What happened to your face?"

"Bruised it horsing around."

"Put a hot piece of raw potato on it soon as you get home. This is my daughter Susan. Came in from South America by plane this morning."

"I recognized her from the picture on the piano," I said politely.

"I hope not," Susan said. "I looked like a freshly stuffed yokel when that damn thing was taken." She had a fast way of talking, like a pitchman.

"Do sit down," Mrs. Owens said. "This has been such a hectic day for me. Susan coming in before daybreak, and then hearing about poor Al.

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I don't understand it, killed in his own bed. And the papers said he had a large amount of money on him. Do you think it was the same robber?"

"Hard to say. Downtown is handling both cases now." I sat in one of the old leather chairs. Mrs. Owens sat on the couch and the daughter leaned against the wall, studying me. When I looked at her she sort of arched her chest as if to prove she wasn't skinny all over.

She said, "That robbery angle sounds like a lot of pure slop to me. There's something damn fishy about a pinch-penny like Al Wales having a bankroll on him . . . and then what we found today. I'm going to be frank with you, level all the way. Because Ma liked your face, she thinks you'll understand."

"What do you want me to understand?"

"It's like this. We don't want to do anything shady, or that might hinder you in finding the killers. At the same time four grand isn't anything to toss away and if it turns out we can keep the dough, I don't want it tied up as evidence for the next hundred years."

"What four . . . ?" I began.

"Hold still for a hot second," Susan told me, darting out of the room, and I mean darting: Those long stems could move.

Mrs. Owens gave me a sickly smile. "We want to do the right thing, what poor Ed would have wanted us to do. I wanted to take it to the local station house at once, but Susan thought it would be just as well to ask your advice. She has a smart head about these things and four thousand dollars is quite a sum. We found it this afternoon."

"You found four thousand bucks?" I asked as Susan came bounding into the room carrying a large dresser drawer. It was an old plain one, cracked in several places. She stood it up, upside-down on the living room table as Mrs. Owens reached over to yank a lace covering out of the way. Susan put a small pile of $50 bills on the drawer and a savings bank book with the word 'cancelled' cut across it. Hunks of dirty white tape were clinging to the bottom of the drawer. I had a feeling they were setting up a show for me.

"I was going through Pop's things, you know, getting them ready to throw out, or sell. I had this drawer out too far and it nearly fell. When I grabbed it, I felt the money and bankbook taped to the bottom. I didn't know it was money—the dinero was in a plain white envelope—till I tore the envelope open and saw the green. This is what we want to see you about—four grand and this bankbook. It's a Brooklyn savings bank and in the name of Francis Parker. As you'll see the account was opened this March with five bucks. A week later there was a deposit of

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ten dollars. On April first there's a withdrawal of four dollars, and on April fifth a deposit of four thousand dollars and seventy-five cents. The entire account was closed out on April twenty-second, about two weeks ago. Take a look at the bank book."

She handed me the book as she nervously lit a cigarette. I said, "You shouldn't have touched things. Where's the envelope?"

"I got so excited when I saw the money, I tore the envelope open. It was all in pieces, so I threw it away."

"Where did you throw it?"

"In the garbage can. It's gone."

"Great!"

"What's so important about an old torn envelope? Told you the envelope tore. Nothing on it, a plain white envelope."

"I was thinking of prints," I said, opening the book. There was a 'ck' next to the $4000.75 deposit, meaning it had been made by check. It was a downtown Brooklyn bank. "Ever hear of Francis Parker before?"

"Never. Neither has Ma and she's sure Pop never mentioned such a name," Susan said, blowing twin clouds of smoke out of her sharp nose. "Now look, we don't have any idea where this came from and we're not trying to hide anything—that's why you're here. At the same time we don't want this folding money lost in the shuffle. It was found here and possession is nine tenths ownership."

She was staring at me with cool eyes. I could see Mrs. Owens mentioning Ed had said something about getting that place in California soon and Susan Owens going to work like a ferret. This fitted in with Wales hunting around the abandoned garage for dough . . . except that was ten years ago and this account was less than ten weeks old. I asked, "Where's the other bank books?"

"This is the only one," Mrs. Owens said. "Except a joint account Ed and I had over on 3rd Avenue. We have $567.00 there."

"Mr. Owens have a safe deposit vault, did you see any odd keys about?" I asked.

"Look, look, Pa rarely had one buck to rub against another. That I know. And I looked carefully, under everything, this is all I found," Susan said.

"I know you did. Mrs. Owens, you told me your husband said he might be able to get a farm in California soon. Are you positive he didn't have any money hidden away, never spoke of any money?"

"He didn't. Why poor Ed could just about make ends meet and . . ."

"This might be the string to your husband's killing. I have to know the truth about this money," I said, making my voice hard.

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"Do we look like rich people?" the old lady asked, her eyes beginning to water.

"Looks don't mean a thing. Did Ed at any time in the last dozen years talk about striking big money?"

"No. *Never!*" The tears came.

"What you doing to Ma?" Susan barked. "I told . . ."

"Shut up!" I bent toward Mrs. Owens, said softly, "I'm not trying to be rough, but in the light of other things I know about Wales, this can be a real lead. Tell me again that Ed Owens never had or even mentioned any big money."

"He never did. We were always counting each dollar. Ed never gambled unless he had an extra dollar."

"Sorry I blew up. I believe you," I said. And I did. I asked, "What do you want me to do? Don't expect me to go on the hook, this is evidence and I won't . . ."

"We're playing it straight with you, Mr. Wintino," Susan cut in. "You were one of the detectives on the case—we're telling you about it. But Ma felt that since you're new and not boiled in oil like some of the oldtimers, you'd understand what four grand means to a cop's widow scrimping along on a lousy pension."

"Sure I understand. But I'm not going to hang myself. I have to turn this in."

"Nobody is asking you to get up a sweat; if you have to turn the money in, you have to. Suppose we hold on to it till tomorrow? I have a list of the bill numbers. You take the bank book, see what you can find out. For all we know maybe one of Pa's nags finally came in. We're not leaving town—if we didn't want to play straight we could have kept mum about all this. If by tomorrow afternoon you feel this has something to do with the case, we'll hand it over. If you ask for it now, we'll get tough too, force you to get a court order. There, that gives you an out."

I grinned at her with admiration—she was real smart. This could put me in the saddle, if it was the break in the case. It might be what I needed—not only was I holding out the dope I learned this morning, but those Data clowns might be melting my badge by now. Of course if this turned out to be a wrongo, if the Owenses were playing me for a sucker . . . hell, they could only hang me once.

"What's it going to be?" Susan asked.

"I'll play along till tomorrow afternoon. But I want a list of the bills, the bank book, and a sample of your father's writing, his signature if you have it handy. I'll have to call the precinct, tell them something.

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If my lieutenant is there, you're out of luck. If not, I called and covered myself—sort of. You'll have to take that gamble."

"If you want it that way. I'll tell anybody about a court order."

"They won't need a court order," I said, looking around for the phone.

"Out there, on the hall table," Susan said, pointing a skinny finger. "And you tell them they'll sure need something good to get this four grand out of my hands. And don't forget the part about I'm not trying to obstruct justice, but neither am I going to play potsy with our dough or . . ."

I dialed the squad room. Landon answered, said Reed was gone for the day. I told him, "I'm over at Mrs. Owens' house. She's found something that might be a lead, a cancelled savings bank book that . . ."

"Will you never stop playing detective?" Landon asked. I tried not to sound relieved over the phone as I said, "Well, Reed knows I'm here. Tell him I'll check on it in the morning and be in touch with him. It may be important."

"Everything is important to you except your own time. When will you learn this isn't our case any more?"

"You know Mrs. Owens phoned me. What am I supposed to do, tell her to ask the switchboard to connect her downtown? Just leave a message for Reed that I called and will be in touch tomorrow."

"I'll do that, Mr. Holmes," Landon said, hanging up.

Susan smiled—all her teeth white and strong. "What's the matter, the lads afraid they'll overwork themselves?"

"Busy on routine stuff. But I'm not busy, that's why I'm doing this—I'll work it my way. You know I won't be able to move till morning, when the bank opens. I'll phone you as soon as I can. If the money is evidence, I don't want any tears or arguments about it."

"I'm a cop's daughter, I wouldn't be so stupid as to beat the law. And if this will help in any way to find who did Pa in, I wouldn't hesitate a second to . . ."

"I know, you're a doll."

Her eyes seemed to laugh at me as she said, "That's not nice talk buster. I might give you a box of cigars if things come out right."

"Now you're talking out of turn. I don't smoke," I said, as we stepped back into the living room. I pocketed the bank book. "Get me something with Mr. Owens' signature, and the list of bill numbers. Also an envelope. Make it two envelopes."

"Have the list in my room—some job copying them all down," Susan said, dashing out of the living room.

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I was about to say it must have been a labor of love but kept my trap shut and asked Mrs. Owens, "Do you remember much about the time Mr. Owens and Mr. Wales arrested Sal Kahn, sent him to the chair?"

"I remember they were promoted for it, made detective second grade. And Ed and Al had their pictures in the papers. My, that was a long time ago."

"Yeah. Did Mr. Owens ever mention that collar, say anything at all about it, during the last couple of years?"

She shook her fat head. "No. He rarely talked about police work. Always said a good cop left his work at the station."

Susan came back like a nervous wind, handed me the list of serial numbers and dropped two large envelopes on the table. I picked a couple of fifties from the pile for a spot check as Susan said, "You have a real trusting nature."

"Just careful." The bills checked with the list. "Put the money in one of the envelopes and don't play with it. Speaking of money Mrs. Owens, did the late Mrs. Wales ever mention money? Did she seem well-fixed?"

"Indeed not. They lived on the upper West side in a cheap apartment house on the top floor. Not having children they should have been able to live better but Dora Wales was always in poor health. A wonderfully kind woman. She and Al were very happy. He never once complained about her delicate condition or the doctor bills."

"That's a fact," Susan said, picking up the money and giving it a silent count. "She was no bargain, always in bed sick, but they seemed to blend together."

I thought of Rose and her little man-and-wife private world.

"Never saw them have a fight," the old lady went on. "And when poor Dora took real sick back in 1949, Al saw to it she had only the best, even though he knew it was hopeless. They must have saved during the years, like I said they never lived well, and all their savings went for these big doctors."

"Recall the name of any of them?" I asked, keeping an eye on Susan's hands and the money.

Mrs. Owens looked up toward the ceiling in thought. "Yes, I do. Because I once had to take Dora over to Park Avenue for X-Ray treatments when Al was stuck on a case. It was 79th and Park and I remember because it was the first time I was ever in that rich section, and the doctor, he had the same name as the ballplayer, DiMaggio."

"You and Mr. Owens and the Wales were always on good terms, weren't you?"

"Thicker than mud," Susan put in, having finished counting and

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satisfied I hadn't palmed a bill. She put the money in one of the envelopes. "Only thing ever separated them was distance, we in the Bronx and they downtown."

I took the envelope, sealed it, and wrote across the flap, 'Keep this shut and don't finger the money, might still raise prints on the bills.' I gave it back to Susan. "I'm not kidding, don't open this envelope and don't lose it." I took the second envelope and using my nails, peeled the remains of the tape from the drawer, dropped them in the envelope and pocketed it. "Might get prints from this too, if you haven't smudged it too much." I took the drawer, looked around, and put it behind the piano. "Leave this here, don't let anybody touch it. More possible prints."

Susan pulled a card from her pocket. "You're so busy being a hotshot cop, you forgot this. Pa used to be a joiner, this is one of his lodge cards—with his signature."

I said thanks as I put the card in my wallet. There was a moment of awkward silence which the old lady broke with, "I was making supper. We'd love to have you join us, Mr. Wintino."

"Thank you, but my wife is waiting supper for me," I said, anxious to get going. "It may be the police will be up tonight or tomorrow, routine questions about Wales. An official visit. If they come, tell them exactly what you told me, give them the money if they want it."

"We certainly will," Mrs. Owens said. "And I'm grateful for your interest in us. So much has happened today, I'll be glad to get supper over with and take to my bed. I'll be able to sleep now, with Susan home."

"I'll see Wintino to the door," Susan told the old lady. At the door she slouched against the wall and was still tall enough to look down at me as she said, "Ma was right about you, you're okay in my book. If you weren't married, I could spend the night telling you about Venezuela. There's a country—all one big angle."

"Maybe some other time," I said, patting her hand as I went out.

On the bus going downtown I kept feeling the bank book in my pocket like it was uranium, and thinking about Susan Owens. I've never been much of a lover boy. I wasn't shy but about the time I was old enough to get real interested I was training for the ring. Then the army kept me on ice for a couple of years, and then marrying Mary when I was 19 took me out of circulation. So it was a surprising shock knowing I could spend the night with Susan; even gave me a kind of reverse-English bang . . . because I didn't want to in the least. But it was nice just knowing.

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AFTER A FAST shower I put on an old silk ring robe and fried the hamburger, and then had a bowl of cereal because there wasn't anything else to eat in the house. I considered trying to get prints on the hunks of tape, but put the envelope away in my shirt drawer. I'd only mess the tape up and spoil it for the lab. Besides, I knew whose prints I'd find.

I stretched out on the couch and waited for Mary, trying to juggle the pieces of the Owens-Wales puzzle till they made even a hazy picture.

Trouble was, nothing made sense. Owens wouldn't tape four grand under a drawer unless there was something wrongo about the money. Or was he merely hiding it from his wife? Hell, it wasn't a few bucks, it was four grand—where did he get it from? And Wales with eleven grand on him. One thing was certain, the money had to be the key to the murders. Suppose the two of them had a racket? But what kind of a racket would pay off 15 grand? Could it be hooked up with a man who was electrocuted a quarter of a century ago? With an old garage torn down years ago?

Above all, why would Wales shoot Owens? Or was I screwy on the garage angle: Maybe this was some brand new racket they were working with the bond house? That didn't add, if they were swiping bonds the loss would be known immediately. Could be that Owens was carrying the eleven grand and Wales wanted it. They could have argued over a payoff and Wales gunned Owens when he refused to split? But hell, a payoff for what? Or was there a third joker in the deck who used Wales gun, maybe without Wales even knowing it? Still, you don't let a guy take your gun like that, even borrow it. But if there was a third party, could Wales have killed Owens and then was shot himself, when he brushed-off the third guy? Then why was the dough left on Wales—another 'amateur' who 'panicked' at the sight of a stiff? Nuts, no 'amateur' would come with a silencer. Still, had to be somebody who knew Wales' habits, knew he'd be sleeping off a toot—or was the killer plain lucky?

Odd the four grand showed up after Susan Owens came home from South America. Maybe it had nothing to do with Owens. Then why was she talking, or was this a front for another deal? A hard doll like Susan with a mind like a knife could be involved in almost anything. Ought to find what she's really doing down in S. A. And there must be

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more dough around the Owens house. Damn, I couldn't do this alone; somebody should be digging into Owens' past, another team working on anybody and everybody who ever knew Wales, and then there was a check needed on all safe deposit vaults . . . if they'd only put the whole force on this, we'd have it licked in a day. The big brass downtown in Central—hadn't even searched Owens' house!

Wales and his sick wife . . . must be tough living all your life with a sickly woman. Crazy things about these murders, seems to be so many loose ends, you'd think if we keep pulling something will give and unravel the whole mess. You'd pass Owens or Wales on the street and you'd never make them for anything but a couple of half-dead codgers waiting for a pine box, and all the time they were hip-deep in something shady. And ex-cops too. Damn, how do I know it was shady? They were cops, why should I judge them? For all I know they might have got some market tips while delivering bonds, made a killing. Have to check that. . . . But why would Owens keep it from his wife, open a phoney account? Round and round we go. . . .

Then Mary came in and I tried to stop thinking about the case.

Later, when I dozed off, thoughts flashing through my noggin like a news reel. I saw Owens dead in the alley, Al Wales sitting shriveled up in the muster room, an empty wreck of a garage in Brooklyn, Susan Owens arching her back as she leaned against the wall, the bank book waiting like a surprise package, and Rose's faint perfume, the touch of her fingers on my cheek.

FRIDAY MORNING

I AWOKE BEFORE Mary, showered and shaved, shook her awake as I put the coffee on. In a one-room apartment the order of getting dressed is important if you have to make time. The cut on my face looked better and I covered it with a band-aid.

Toweling herself after her shower, Mary called out, "Where are you off to so early?"

"Checking on a few things."

"Checking, digging, checking—it's your day off. Why don't you go to a movie?"

"Maybe I will. Want any eggs?"

She pinched her belly. "One egg, no toast or bacon—I'm spreading."

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I ate a quick breakfast. I borrowed a couple of bucks from Mary before she left, washed the dishes. Then I dressed, wearing a plain conservative tie. I found a Dr. DiMaggio on Park Avenue in the phone book and walked up there.

The doctor was a little man, sort of hunched over, and his thick uncombed gray hair made him look top-heavy. His voice was strong and clear, gave me an impression of youth, as he asked, "What does the Police Department want of me?"

"I'm Detective Dave Wintino. 101st Precinct Squad. Perhaps you read in the papers about an Albert Wales being killed two days ago?"

"I don't recall. I haven't time for such news. What has that to do with me . . . Detective Wintino? Italiano?"

I said in Italian, "Yes, my father is from Bari."

"I like to see young Italians in such jobs," he said. Then he switched to English and asked again, "What has all this to do with me?"

"In 1949 Wales' wife, Dora, was a patient of yours. I understand she was operated on, received a lot of medical treatment before she died. I'd like to know how much Mr. Wales paid for all this."

"A doctor's records are confidential."

"I know that," I said in Italian. "I assume you wish to cooperate with the police."

Dr. DiMaggio shrugged. "Enough of the old tongue. Of course I wish to help but what would a doctor's bill, assuming she was a patient of mine in 1949, have to do with a murder of several days ago?"

"A large sum of money was found on Wales. I'm interested in knowing if he had a lot of money back in '49."

"I can see no harm. Let me look at my files," the doctor said, crossing the room to a file cabinet and opening a drawer.

He said, "Come here, young man, no sense in my taking the file out. Yes, I did have a patient named Mrs. Dora Wales. Started treating her in September 1948. She had a malignant growth. I gave her a course of X-ray treatments. As to her medical history, she was operated on the following April, sent to a private hospital for . . ."

"What did all this cost, doc?" I asked, my notebook out.

"A famous specialist was brought in, at the request of Mr. Wales. . . ." He bent over a card, trying to read something in the dim light. "Ah yes, I see that Mr. Wales was also a member of the police force, I do recall the case now. Although I told Mr. Wales it was hopeless, he insisted upon every possible treatment. The constant hope of the layman. However you are only interested in the costs . . . My fees over a period of three months amounted to $1100."

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"How about the other expenses, hospitals, specialists, all that?"

"I cannot give you an exact amount. However with the various specialists, the private rooms and nurses—I'd say Mr. Wales spent between five and six thousand dollars."

"Would he have to pay that all at once?"

"Yes. I note here he had Mrs. Wales taken in a private ambulance down to Baltimore for examination. That would be most expensive."

"Thanks, Doc. That's all I wanted to know," I said wondering if downtown had checked the banks for any other accounts Wales may have had. Hell, that would be the first thing they did. I took out the newspaper snap of Wales, showed it to the doc. "This is Mr. Wales. Can you remember anything else about him?"

"Frankly I do not remember the face, but then hundreds of faces pass through my office every month. I'm sorry I can't be of much assistance."

"You've given me exactly what I wanted. Thank you."

As I walked out he said, "Good-bye" in Italian and waved.

I walked over to Lexington Avenue and took the subway to Brooklyn, excitement mounting in me. It was a small savings bank and the manager looked as if he'd just been plucked from a fireside, a little on the sleepy side. He gave me the usual song and dance about it being most 'irregular' to give out the info I wanted. I told him it was also 'irregular' to kill ex-cops, and when I showed him the news clippings on the murders, gave him the cooperation pitch, he warmed up. I was in a small sweat that he would call Headquarters to double-check me, but he didn't.

From his records and the code number of the $4000.75 check on the deposit slip, he told me it was drawn on the Capital Exchange Bank & Trust but he had no way of knowing which branch. Without telling them why I showed both pictures to the tellers and a tall, slick-looking colored woman said she was "pretty sure" Owens was Francis Parker, claimed she remembered him because the amount was "quite large" when he closed out his account. That didn't mean much, Owens' picture was an old one.

While I checked the Brooklyn address Francis Parker had given when he opened the account—and found it to be as phoney as I expected—the manager compared Parker's signature card with Ed Owens' lodge card. We didn't have to be handwriting experts to see they were the same—a cramped way of writing 'a' and 'e'.

After thanking the manager and asking him to keep it quiet, I went back to downtown Manhattan, to the head office of the Capital Bank & Trust, and ran into trouble. I was bucked from one stuffed-shirt official to another, each insisting on a court order or a note from the D.A.

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Finally I landed in the office of the top banana. He was a plump little joker with a butterball face clear as a baby's rear, a pointed waxed moustache, and a good gray wig that took me a lot of minutes to take. I was astonished—he looked like the bankers you see in the movies.

He examined my badge as if it was a work of art, said, "I don't see any harm in helping you, Detective. However if we have such a check, perhaps we'll have to notify the signer that we have given you the information. I'll see what our Legal Dpartment has to say. First we'll see if there is such a check. $4000.75—that's a help, an odd amount, and drawn to a Francis Parker sometime around the first of last month."

"It was deposited on April 5th."

"Then we paid out the money on the 6th or 7th. Take some time, at least twenty minutes," he said, getting his secretary on the intercom phone, giving her the information.

Then he leaned back in his big chair and gave me a happy look as he said, "As it happens, I'm a rabid detective story fan. Read a book a night, best way I know to relax. Only thing I liked about FDR, he was a detective fan too. Now I've always wanted to ask a real detective. . . ."

Damn if this character didn't tell me about a dozen screwy plots, asking me this and that as though it was a quiz program. I couldn't come up with a single correct answer and he looked disappointed. Finally I said, "Look, in a book or a movie the crime is rigged because the writer invents all the angles—usually in favor of the crook."

"Nonsense, these books prove crime doesn't pay."

"No, the writer, like most other people, thinks he can out-smart the police. He's showing off, saying this is how I could do the crime if I wanted to—despite the righteous ending tagged on the last page. In a real crime, you have to run down a thousand dead leads, like I'm doing, to get to the one that will break the case."

"But then you have the use of the finest labs, many men, to facilitate your work, whereas the private eye has only his wits," he said as if letting me in on a secret.

I went along with the game, trying not to laugh at this big executive who sounded like a comic book reader. "Let me give you a tip, labs can help but there's still nothing been invented good as a stoolie. This honor among thieves is strictly for the birds—and the books. You'll always find guys anxious to sell out for a ten buck bill. And to process a clue in the lab takes time, but one word from a stoolie is the fastest shortcut to the solution," I said, wondering how soon I'd luck up on a guy or two in the know and out on parole, get me a couple of stools.

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"Stoolies?" the bank man said, disgust on his fat face. "That seems an ugly, unfair way to . . ."

His secretary came in a few minutes later and placed a slip of paper before him. She was one of these tall, classy-looking babes, especially in the legs. Big boy picked up his phone and went into a long conversation with somebody—probably in the Legal Department. This somebody kept advising him not to give out the information.

Standing up, he told me, "Our legal boys lean toward the conservative side, naturally. They say we could find ourselves in a law suit and at the wrong end of some publicity by giving you this information. You wait here. I'll be back in five or ten minutes." He gave me a pop-eyed stare as he walked out.

He was okay, the slip of paper was still on his desk. The check had been dated April 2nd, and signed by an Edwin Wren of Wren & Co., a depositor in the bank's midtown branch. The name hit a tiny bell and I leafed through my notebooks—Wren & Co. was one of the electrical companies Rose was exposing. And my hunch began to grow cold, it was like adding pies and snakes—it couldn't be. What possible connection could there be between Owens and Rose? Yet here it was unless the bank had made a mistake, and I had to chance that they didn't. Anyway, I sure couldn't ask.

My banker waddled back in while I was thinking this over. "Sad news," he said happily, sitting behind his desk. "Our lawyers advise against giving out the information. I'm sorry. I think it's nonsense but I'm not a legal eagle." He dropped the slip of paper in his basket, winking at me like a kid as he did so.

"Tough, but rules are rules," I said, rolling with the gag and winking back. "Thank you for your time." I headed for the door.

He called out, "Be sure to tell the Department they'll require a court order to secure the information."

It was noon when I hit the bricks and the street was jammed. I dropped into a drugstore and found Wren & Co., in the phone book—they were in the mid-fifties on the West side. It was hot and I was thirsty and figured I'd have lunch first, but when I saw the mob scene at the soda counter, I took a subway uptown. Could be, Mr. Wren didn't go out for lunch till after one.

He had his own remodeled building, three floors high and not very wide. It was smaller than I'd expected, didn't look like money till I got inside. The office was brightly lit and had huge two-tone photos of the New York City skyline for wallpaper. A large mobile made up of switches, chimes, and the other electrical gadgets they manufactured

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was hanging from the ceiling, turning slowly in the air conditioned breeze. The receptionist wasn't any Miss America but her expensive suit matched the rest of the office—not loud and in good taste. When I asked if Wren was in she gave me a practiced small smile as she asked, "Have you an appointment?"

I shook my head, told her my name as I flashed my tin. "Wren in?"

"I'll see." She phoned in, then told me, "Mr. Wren will see you in a moment. Have a seat, please."

There were a couple of standard leather chairs and a free-form table made of some shiny metal, a bunch of trade magazines on the table. I sat down and glanced at one of the mags. I was so intent on it that it took me a moment to realize somebody was watching me. There were two doors leading from the reception room and one of them was open and a heavy-set short guy was staring at me. He looked more like a working foreman than a boss, yet I knew he was Wren.

We stared at each other for a second and he seemed annoyed. "Alright come in," he said in a weary voice, and walked back into his office, moving with the clumsy grace of a guy who has taken on weight in his middle years.

His office was a sloppy mess—the same modernistic walls and furniture but his desk was covered with papers and blue-prints, and there was another desk at right angles piled high with books and magazines. I shut the door and found him already sitting behind his desk. There was a container of coffee and a half-eaten sandwich in front of him. He motioned toward a black leather and chrome chair and as I sat down he started on the sandwich, mumbling, "I never have time for lunch."

"Are you Mr. Edwin Wren?"

He nodded.

"I'm Detective David . . ."

"I know who you are." He leaned back in his swivel chair, rocking slightly, and watched me as he chewed his sandwich thoroughly. He looked the perfect picture of an overworked small business man.

I let him work me over with his eyes, then he washed the food down with the cold coffee, tossed the container in the wastebasket, spilling some on the rug. He hid his mouth with a pudgy hand as he belched. "Goddamn coffee, worse than the cigarette habit, kills a man's stomach." He brushed crumbs from his moustache, said, "You're just a kid with a badge." His voice wasn't nasty, just weary.

"Which would you rather see, my birth certificate or my badge?"

"Aren't you overdoing things, Mr. Wintino?" he asked, putting on his glasses. They were powerful and made his eyes look large and soft.

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"I don't know, what am I overdoing?"

"I commend your thoroughness in tracing me, but as the Data men told you yesterday, we haven't broken any laws and the whole business of this silly girl writing a . . ."

"I'm not here about that," I cut in, surprised the Data lads yelled to a client. "I'm here to ask about a $4000.75 check you made out to a Francis Parker on April 2nd."

The eyes got even bigger behind the glasses. The only sound in the office was the slight squeak of his chair as he rocked. I like catching a guy off-balance, watching him rolling a mental log. But when he asked, "And why is the Police Department interested in that?" his voice was almost asleep. He fumbled in a desk drawer, took out a large pipe and a pouch, packed the pipe.

"You tell me, Mr. Wren," I told him, trying to sound just as casual. "I traced the check to you through a bank account under the phoney name of Francis Parker. His picture has been in the papers—you certainly know that 'Parker' is a retired cop who was murdered a few days ago."

Wren puffed on his pipe and nodded. The tobacco had a nutty smell that wasn't bad at all. He said, "I barely glance at the papers but I did see a minor headline about a shooting. Still, exactly why are you here, why is a business check of mine official police business?"

"I'm doing this on my own time, Mr. Wren, so I would appreciate it if you'd stop fencing. An ex-cop is murdered, we find four thousand in cash in his house and a bank book. You gave the dead man the four grand. You read about the killing. Why haven't you come forward to tell us about the money, the phoney name?"

"Because I had hired this ex-cop to do some work for me. He did it and I paid him. That was some six or seven weeks ago. I still fail to see how that is any concern of the police."

"What sort of work did he do for you?"

Wren lit his pipe again before he said, "Detective work. We'd heard rumors of Miss Henderson's article and we wanted to learn who the author was, where she lived—various details. Frankly at that stage we didn't even want a known private agency on the case. One night I met this retired policeman in a bar, we got to talking over some beers. It occured to me he was the man for our job. I hired him on the spot."

"He didn't have a license for private work."

Wren smiled. "That didn't seem to upset either of us."

"And he found Miss Henderson for you?"

"Yes."

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"You paid him four grand for that? What the hell was the 75¢ for?"

Wren puffed hard on his pipe, said over the smoke, "I'm afraid the entire transaction ended on a sour note. Mr. Parker—he insisted on being called that and paid under that name, to avoid taxes I suppose, although I never asked him—anyway, Mr. Parker located the writer within a few days. We had agreed upon payment of one thousand dollars plus modest expenses, if any. I then suggested to Mr. Parker he start . . . let's use the word harass . . . that he start harassing Miss Henderson. He refused. The truth is he turned about and bluntly threatened me with outright blackmail: He wanted four thousand dollars or he would sell his story to Miss Henderson and this lousy *Weekly Spectator*. I had no choice, I paid." Wren slipped me a quick smile. "Mr. Parker was not without a sense of humor, he insisted 75¢ be added for 'expenses'—three subway fares and three phone calls. I am aware what I am telling you leaves me open to more blackmail, but I have confidence in your honest young face."

"Cut the sarcasm. The word honest has a hollow ring coming from you," I said. I didn't know enough about Owens to figure him for blackmail or not. Maybe he saw this as the last chance to dig into the cracker barrel.

Wren stared at me, those large soft eyes behind the glasses twin pictures of pity. "Pretty strong language, young man."

"Your clowns have been giving Miss Henderson a strong pushing around, a real bad time."

"I take objection to your slur. We're businessmen who . . ."

"Who Miss Henderson says are breaking the law."

He shook his head. "That's her opinion. It's true that by . . . uh . . . monopolizing this particular item we will keep the price up, but at the same time we would be able to control the quality, keep that up too."

"Okay, you're public benefactors, what has this to do with the check?"

"Don't be so brash, young man. I want you to see the whole picture, including the check. What we are doing is being done all the time and by the most respected people."

"Mr. Wren, this talk is getting us away from Parker and why you didn't come to the Police."

"On the contrary. Miss Henderson is a crackpot, out to make her own type of fast dollar. You can understand why I had to pay off Mr. Parker. I haven't gone to the police and don't want any publicity about the matter, if it can be helped. I had a business deal with a man, weeks later he is shot—that obviously had nothing to do with me. Once I paid off, I was done with the matter, never saw him again."

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"There are three others concerned in this, do they all . . .?"

"I handled this myself."

"Why?"

Wren lit his pipe again. "A good question. I met up with this former cop, I made the deal. When it turned sour I took full and sole responsibility. There's also the matter of pride, I didn't—and don't—want the others to know I'd been taken in."

"So you shelled out four grand, just like that?"

"Not just like *that*," he said, pointing his pipe at me. "This goes down as a business expense, taxes will absorb most of the loss. I got the information I wanted, but I paid more than I expected. That's it in a nut shell."

"If you report this as a tax loss, what about the phoney name of Parker, which he was using to escape taxes?"

Wren shrugged. "I don't fool with taxes, if he wanted to that was his business."

"Where is this bar and when did you meet him?"

"See here, Detective Wintino, I resent this questioning, as though I was a suspect or something. You're making a mountain out of a mole hill."

"I never said you were a suspect, and a dead man isn't a mole hill. I'm asking you these questions because it may lead to somebody, and so on, until we hit the right one."

"Then I can be of little help. We first met at some bar on 6th Avenue, I don't remember exactly. That was around the middle of March. After our first meeting, due to the nature of our business, we thought it best to meet on the street, usually at the corner of 54th Street and . . . As you can see all this has nothing to do with any shooting and it would be darn embarrassing, to say the least, if it came to light. I certainly want to cooperate with the police but I don't wish to make an ass of myself, or to hurt my business. I expect intelligent cooperation from you, if I'm not involved don't drag me in."

"That isn't up to me to decide."

"Believe you said you're doing this on your own time. Same situation when you invaded the Data Office. I don't know what you fancy yourself, but, common sense has to be a factor in things too. I once had a minor business deal with a man later found dead. That's all there is to it. Period."

"This isn't exactly my own time, a cop is on duty 24 hours. A retired cop has been killed; we're not leaving anything to chance."

"Fine, I'm all for you. But don't you think you've taken up enough

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of my time? I'm a busy man." Wren knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "I've given you all the help I can. I'm not sure whether I'd repeat our conversation again, even to your superiors. As I believe the Data people told you, if you become a pest, you'll be broken. Now wait, I'm not threatening you, but appealing to your common sense. I thought you were here on this silly Henderson matter and you start questioning me about a murder. I've told you all I know, please don't put a knife in my business back as a reward."

I stood up, "No need to worry if the department should call you in for further questioning, that doesn't mean the papers will get wind of it. As for Miss Henderson, just keep your dealings with her on a business level—not on a goon level."

Wren got to his feet. "I know when I'm licked. She can publish her damn yarn and the devil with it. We can get around that. Sorry if I sounded as if I was throwing my weight around a second ago, but you must understand my position. The publicity of an article can be handled, but a scandal, being even publicly questioned about a killing—my business would be ruined." He took off his glasses, rubbed his eyes. "I'm under a strain, this new wiring method Miss Henderson must have told you about. I've been going 15 and 16 hours a day. That's why I lost my temper before. Well, hope I've been of some help." He held out his hand.

I shook it. "At least we know where Ed Owens got the four grand from."

Wren's tan face went ashen, his eyes seemed to pop, get as large as if he had his glasses on. Then he began coughing as he bent over, kneading his belly with his stubby hands.

"What's the matter?" I asked, stepping back in case he was about to be sick. "Need a pill? Water?"

He shook his head and slowly straightened up, ran a crumpled handkerchief over his sweaty face. He whispered, "Excuse me. These quickie lunches—had a gas pain that seemed to stab at my heart. Thought I was going to faint."

"Ought to have a check-up."

"Yes, I'm past due. Now, what were you saying about Owens?"

"That we now know how and where Owens got the money, the reason for the false name in the bank. Another piece that may fit into a bigger picture, one of two murders. That's police work." I pulled out the newspaper pictures. "This your Mr. Parker?"

Wren pointed to Owens' snap. "Yes, although it must have been taken many years ago. Yes, I did see something about the other killing—I only

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skim through the papers. Well, I've helped you, see what you can do to shield me from any possible notoriety," Wren said, walking me to the door.

"You don't have to worry about that."

"Well, have to be on the safe side when . . ." His face screwed up with flushed pain again and he mumbled, "I . . . uh . . . have to . . . sounds silly but . . . Good day, Detective Wintino, I have to go!"

I'd thought his coughing and the rest of it was part of an act to get rid of me. Most people get nervous when around a cop for any length of time, but Wren actually did run by me across the reception room, and through another door.

The girl at the desk just shook her head, said, "He never listens, his wife keeps telling him to slow down. He'll get himself an ulcer yet."

"An executive type one, I suppose," I said, walking out.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON

IT WAS 1:43 P.M.

I was hungry. For awhile I didn't want to think of Wren, the frightened business man, let my thoughts cook for a few minutes. I had a bright idea, long as I was downtown I might as well see Uncle Frank and stick him for lunch, save some dough. I phoned and he asked, "Davie, you coming to see me?"

"Yes. I'm downtown, thought we might have a bite together." Although if Uncle Frank didn't reach for the tab first, I'd be in a fine spot.

"Who has time for lunch? I just ate a stale sandwich and a bottle of soda. My ulcer will kill me tonight. When will you be over?"

"About a half hour, I have a few calls to make. See you soon."

I dialed the Owens' house. Susan's sharp voice asked, "Yes?"

"It isn't yes, it's no."

"What? Who is this?"

"Dave Wintino.'

"I've been waiting for your call. What about the money, can we . . . ?"

"So far no. Actually I still don't know, so leave the dough alone. I've found the guy who handed out the money but things are still foggy."

"Who's Francis Parker?"

"Your father, on a tax dodge. Remember, don't touch the cash and let me talk to your mother."

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"If Parker was Pa then the money should be ours."

"We'll see. I don't know yet that it isn't yours. Put your mother on," I said, hoping I could finish the call without paying an extra nickel.

I heard Susan yell, "Ma, come to the phone," her voice a hard bark. Then she told me, "One thing, Dave, if there's any doubt it's going to be in our favor. Not handing out four grand like . . ."

"Take it slow, we're giving it a try. That's what you wanted. Where's your mother?"

There was a moment of silence and then the old lady said, "This is Mrs. Owens."

"Dave Wintino, Mrs. Owens. During March did Mr. Owens ever mention doing any outside work? I don't mean at the brokerage house, but detective work?"

"Why I . . ." Jane Owens began as the operator cut in with, "Five cents for the next three minutes, please."

"What did you say?" Mrs. Owens asked as I told her to hang on, dug out a nickel and put it to work. "Did Ed ever mention doing any private detective work in March?"

"No."

"When he talked about getting the little farm in California soon—about when was that?"

"About two months ago."

"And he didn't say how he expected to get the money for the farm?"

"No. He was just talking big."

"At any time since he retired did he ever talk about doing private detective work?"

"No. He couldn't have done any work like that, he was home till he left for the brokerage office and then he always came right home to work in his garden before it got dark."

"Okay. Thanks. I'll keep in touch." I hung up as she started to ask about the money. I got the manager of the brokerage house, another fifteen cent call since I had to wait till he finished talking on another phone. He said Owens had never missed a day since he'd worked there. Wales had been sick sometimes. "You know the kind of sickness, he drank too much of his favorite pain-killer," the manager added.

"If you knew he was a lush, why did you hire him?"

"I never said he was a drunk. I wouldn't talk harshly about the departed or . . ."

"Which way do you think you were talking now about him?" I asked and hung up.

I stopped at a stand for an orange drink and a couple of doughnuts

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and food reminded me I was supposed to call my folks. I chewed the junk slowly, I usually can do my best thinking when I'm stuffing my mouth. But now I thought about Wren and came up with nothing.

I had an uneasy feeling about things—I was playing it wrong by holding out on Reed and the boys downtown. Trouble was I was in over my head, playing a lone hand when I'd never even been on a murder before, much less a double one. If Reed ever found out I'd look like a kid playing amateur dick. Keep up the way I'm going and I'd end up minus my badge—unless I could come in with the whole answer.

I decided to give myself a deadline—by tonight I'd tell Reed about the four grand, Wales watching the garage for years, and Owens working for Wren. In the meantime I still had a couple of hours in which to dig. No sense wasting time being scared. I got some change and phoned Rose—no answer, I was counting on her for more dope on Wren. I called Ma and she said, "Davey, I've been trying to reach you. I'm cooking, are you and Mary coming up for supper?"

"Well I . . . uh . . ."

"Davey, we haven't seen you in two weeks. Papa is so hurt, you mustn't ignore us." Her voice was full of shrill pleading.

"Aw Ma, I'm not ignoring you. I've been busy. Okay, we'll be up for dinner. Around six-thirty. And Ma, it's hot, don't make nothing heavy."

"Don't you worry about my food, it will stick to your ribs. Don't bring me any candy or other *dreck*. You're not a guest, you're my son."

"Okay Ma, see you tonight."

The phone company was getting rich off me. I dialed Mary and she blew her top when I told her. "Dave, this is Friday night, I want to go out, see a movie, have a drink."

"We'll see a movie tomorrow. You know how Ma and Pop are, and we haven't been up there for weeks."

"Tomorrow? Sure, you have to be at your lousy job by midnight! Why didn't you go up and see your mother this afternoon?"

"I was busy and she wants us up in the evening when Pop's there. I'm on my way to see Uncle Frank now. Come on Mary, you know this family stuff, I can't get out of it."

"Dave, it's been a long week for me, I'm tired. I'm definitely not in the mood to eat one of those heavy meals, listen to your folks gab in two different languages or . . ."

"You mean language-wise you're bored because they don't talk that cocktail drip like the queers in your office?"

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There was a heavy silence at the other end till Mary said calmly, "Dave, I'm not going to make a scene. I'll phone and beg off, tell them the truth—I'm tired. You go up and . . ."

"You bet I'm going!" I said and hung up.

Sore as a boil I tried Rose again and she was still out. I might as well see Uncle Frank and get some peace at home. I took a bus down to his sweatshop. All the time Wales and Owens and the money kept burning over in my mind, like those little steel balls you try to wiggle into holes in hand puzzles—only nothing fitted.

I'd heard a lot about his joint but I'd never visited the place before. It actually was a beehive of activity, or something. And it really wasn't *his* place, he was one-third partner. They had the basement and first floor of a large building in the heart of the garment district, and the whole place was a lacework of conveyer belts and endless tracks of rollers with packages moving in a steady stream on top of the rollers.

Uncle Frank looked as though he was made up for laughs—an old pair of dungarees straining to cover his medicine ball gut, a dirty loud plaid shirt, a dead cigar in his mouth like a whistle, and a pair of pince-nez glasses on his fat nose. He looked a little like Mary's father, something about him that still shouted hayseed.

Frank never stood still for a second; walking and running all over the place, taking packages from one conveyer belt to another, or throwing them down a chute, bawling out people, screaming orders. There seemed to be thousands of packages, from thin tie boxes to big crates. At the end of each roller, where the chutes started, there were scales, and girls, mostly colored, perched beside the scales and writing down the weights and addresses as men and boys lifted the packages onto the scales, then tossed them down the chutes where they were stacked, or put on skids and pulled out to trucks.

Uncle Frank always was a jerky talker and as he showed me around he would break off a sentence with a nervous yell to somebody about, "Why are you shipping dresses today? It's Friday, all dress goods go express. *Express,* goddamn it!"

He asked me, "Well, how do you like it, Davie? Plenty of action, and this is the start of the slow season. Around November we're busy as crows at seeding time—packages stacked right to the ceilings. The way it should be, we pay rent for space up to and including the ceilings and then . . ." He stopped to grab a large carton marked FRAGILE-GLASS, off a roller and throw it on a pile across the room as he shouted at a kid who didn't look over 16, "Where's your eyes, Paddy? That was plainly marked air freight. See that it gets to the last chute and be careful."

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He ran a hand over his big lantern-jaw and whispered loudly to me, "The breakage these darn kids cause. I don't know, when I was coming up kids were. . . . How do you like it, Davie lad? We go like this from eight in the morning up to ten or eleven at night."

"Sure a lot of movement. What's it all about?" I asked, thinking it was odd about Wren coming across a retired cop in a bar just when he needed one.

"This is a very big operation," Uncle Frank said, blowing up his chest and launching into an after dinner speech. "New York is the style center, the clothing center. Let us suppose you own a shop out in Dayton, Ohio. Well, you have to buy here, either directly or by mail, and you have to pay the shipping costs. Now say you buy a dress for two dollars and plan to retail it at three-fifty. The shipping—Hey, you in the blue sweatshirt on the south roller, don't pile those boxes so high, they'll fall and jam the roller. What was I saying, Davie?"

"A dress for three-fifty," I said, watching an old man neatly toss a flat dress box on top of a pile of boxes about ten feet high, tossing it like a basketball player sinking a foul shot. Did the four grand have anything to do with the Owens killing, or was it another blind alley? As a motive it wasn't so hot, why wait six, seven weeks?

"Oh yes, you buy the dress for two dollars. If you have it sent parcel post, insured, the postage will amount to, say . . . about 70¢. This means you can't retail the dress for under four dollars. A dress weighs about three to four pounds, packed. Suppose you buy fifty dresses, that's over forty dollars in postage alone. Are you following me?"

"Right behind you." Had Wales and Owens been doing private work all along? That would account for the wad Wales had on him. But the private eye business wasn't that good . . . Unless they were doing blackmail. Then why the crummy messenger jobs? A cover? And why wouldn't Mrs. Owens know? Or had she been lying all the time? No, then she would have kept quiet about the four grand.

". . . And so you have *all* your orders delivered to us—the manufacturers deliver free within the city. We wait till you have 100 pounds of freight and ship by 100 pound lots, thus cutting your shipping costs in half, including the few cents per item for our service. Handling thousands of packages per day, we make a nice profit, although we carry a terrific overhead and have to . . . Come on Davie, we'll go up to my office. We'll be able to hear ourselves think there."

We climbed around and over wooden crates, walked through zig-zag aisles of packages; I was watching my clothes while Uncle Frank was barking instructions at people as he walked—most of the people not even

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listening to him. We went up some stairs where a bevy of elderly women were working adding machines fast as typewriters, and into a battered office. Uncle Frank sat down behind his old desk and relit his cigar, mouthed a couple of pills as he said, "Always around now, when business is slow, my stomach acts up."

"Is any business worth a nervous gut?" I asked, studying Uncle Frank.

"Ulcers, nervous stomach, piles, I've had them all. But I have an appointment in a few minutes, so let me tell you our proposition. I've talked this over with my partners and they agree you're the ideal lad for us."

"I am? What makes me so ideal?"

"Davie, as you saw, we have a very democratic sort of hiring system here, and we're proud of it. We give colored women office jobs, use youngsters just out of school or going to night school, as part time workers. Or we help men out who put in a few hours in the evening to supplement their take-home-pay. We even give handicapped people a break, hire deaf and dumb. You would start in shipping, at the bottom. That would make things look good and also give you a chance to learn the business. With your Italian name, nobody will ever suspect you are related to me. Starting pay will only be about $35.00 a week, but within two months I guarantee you will be taking home $55.00 every Friday night."

"That still isn't any hell."

Uncle Frank chewed on his cigar as he tried to smile. "Now, Davie lad, I know all about you policemen; you pay for your gun, for your bullets, money is taken out of every check for your pension; then there's the station house tax, and this and that bite. Mary told me over the phone that you were paid a few days ago and it's gone already. You can't expect to start at the top, or to get rich overnight."

"I don't," I said, wondering if Owens had, in his old age.

"You must look at this as a long range deal. You saw how I work and I mean physical work—I'm working harder than when I was a youngster at haying time. I'm too old for this, and so are my partners. In time you'll be in charge of the day shift, and that means $100 a week, perhaps a share in the concern. And there's extras to be had—trucking outfits hand out cash Christmas presents. Lad, you have to see this as an opportunity not merely as a job."

"I certainly appreciate you're thinking of me," I said, wondering why I was wasting precious time here, "but I don't know if I'm suited for this . . ."

"But you are!" Uncle Frank said, bending over the desk and whispering; his breath smelled like last week's food. "You speak Jewish and

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Italian. You see, we employ a good many Eyeties and Jews here and you would know what was going on all the time. Let's say, if there was any union talk. And although you don't look it, you're tough, an ex-fighter and a cop. Sometimes we have a little trouble. Suppose the kids we hire are a little wild, or the old timers turn out to be drinkers. You could keep them in line. And occasionally, there is some theft. Not so much with our employees, although for 75¢ an hour we can't expect the cream, but in this area you find winos, especially at night. They swipe packages if the doors are open, or while the kids are loading a truck."

"I'd be a combination straw boss and cop?"

"Now, don't get a wrong slant, we don't have trouble every day or every week, but it does happen, and it jacks up our insurance premiums. Lad, the secret of this business is to knock off every penny of overhead possible, save every second of . . ." Uncle Frank pointed to my wrist watch and shot out of his chair as if he was goosed. "Lord, where does time go to! It's three-thirty, I'm late for my appointment. Think it over, my boy, a long range opportunity. You may be boss of the place by the time you're 35. Phone me here tomorrow."

"Tomorrow is Saturday," I said as Uncle Frank opened a locker, took off his dungarees and shirt, standing in faded pink silk shorts for a second, his legs veined and skinny. Then he changed to a dark brown suit that was sloppy around the shoulders.

"Phone me, I'll be here. Saturdays, Sundays, I'm always here."

I stood up. "I'll think about it but I'm pretty sure this isn't for me. If I'm going to be a cop I want to be a real one, not a store badge."

"My tie straight? Don't make any snap judgment you'll regret. You won't be a 'cop' here, you'll be a junior executive. Talk it over with Mary. When are you two coming over for supper? We have to get together more . . . Tie straight now?"

I fixed the tie and he grabbed his hat and almost flew out of the office. I stood there for a moment, wondering why I didn't have the guts to tell him to stick to his job. Mary and her ulcer deals.

I used his mirror to comb my hair, take a few specks off my suit, then picked up his phone and told the switchboard operator I wanted an outside line.

I dialed Rose. She was home and I said I was on my way up.

"I'll be in the rest of the day, working. I haven't had any more trouble, not even a phone call. I'm grateful. What do you want to see me about?"

"A few questions about something else . . . I'll be up in a half hour."

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On the subway ride uptown I got to thinking of the blackmail angle: Owens and Wales might have been working with a third character, perhaps a licensed private jerk—Although what made having a license so important? They got shady jobs—nobody turns to a private dick unless there's a reason why he can't go to the police—and worked small time blackmail on business men like Wren. If they got four or five grand at a clip, made a couple of scores a year—that could account for Wales' moneybelt—he could have saved eleven grand over a span of a half a dozen years easily, frugal way he lived. But where was Owens' dough? Or was this their first job and Owens refused to split, that's why Wales gunned him? Couldn't be their first job, where did Wales' bundle come from?

But I couldn't buy that at all, or any part of it. You don't kill because somebody holds out a grand—maybe a punk did but not an old time conservative cop like Wales. *Cop*—damn it they were good cops, why should they be doing something crooked in the last years of their life? Why was everybody so sure Wales had killed his partner? Wasn't for the gun there wouldn't be any connection between the crimes. But there was the gun. Perhaps the gun had been planted in his room when the killer finished Wales? Or was Wales so dumb as to keep a murder weapon around?

I made a note of that, wondered why I'd overlooked the angle before. A planted gun added, kept Wales in character. Only what kind of character if they were shakedown artists? And to use Wales' gun, then plant it, a guy would have to be a close friend of Wales. That could be the third party, the private dick—perhaps using Wales and Owens without them suspecting? Nuts, they were old hands, they'd know. And they had to know or how did Wales get all the dough, Owens the four grand?

I made another note as I got off the subway to have a talk with Data, Inc., Saturday morning. Not impossible Owens had been working for them, or if Wren had wanted to get Owens, he would have arranged it through Data. They could give me the dope on what was cooking in the private eye racket. Be a joy talking to them: when I mentioned murder they'd squirm, forget their toy gadgets!

Rose was barefooted in thin black cotton Chinese pants and a loose red pull-over that showed curves whenever and wherever the shirt touched her. A warm smile followed her, "Do come in."

The place looked even smaller, maybe because of the piles of papers and open books next to her typewriter, as I sat down on the couch heavily.

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"I'm okay, won't keep you long. How's the article coming?"

"Fine. I'll be finished in a few days."

I said, "Your buddy, Edwin Wren suddenly cropped up in another case. That's why I'm here. What do you know about him?"

"Almost everything. He's an engineer, married, has two daughters—they live in an old duplex apartment on Riverside Drive and 82nd Street and he goes in . . ."

"He lives on Riverside and 82nd?" I asked—that was only three blocks from where Owens was killed.

"That's right, lived there for many years. He goes in for modest cars, in fact the Wrens live modestly, although over a five year period he has averaged $25,000 a year, above taxes. Wren & Co. was almost a one man affair till the war. He landed a couple of big subcontracts and was able to expand and. . . ."

"Was he ever in any trouble—criminal stuff?"

"Never. This case—what's it all about?"

"I'm working on a double murder and his name popped up in connection with a . . . check," I said, knowing I was talking too much. Wales had warned me about that. Had he talked too much himself? "Where is Wren from?"

"Born here, graduated into the depression, tried to get a job in South America but . . ."

"Hold it. What part of South America and when?" I cut in. Susan Owens worked in S. A.

"He never got the job, lacked experience and in those days a company could get its pick of engineers. He worked on WPA for a few years and along about 1934 opened a small factory in the Bronx, made doorbells and cheap electric chimes. He moved to his present plant in 1949 and has been growing ever since. If they can swing their wire-paint monopoly he'll be in the millionaire bracket. All this of any help to you?"

"He sounds like a solid, aggressive business joker. You sure he's never been in any beef with the law?"

"Not the criminal law."

I must have looked blank for she gave me a full smile and said, "Mr. Detective, let me remind you there are such things as civil laws too and they also can be broken. As my article will prove, Wren and the others are acting in restraint of trade and . . ."

"Easy there, I'm too tired for a lecture. What I want to know is, was he ever in any law-suits, jams, anything like that?"

"Plenty," she said going over to a file cabinet and returning with a

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folder of notes, newspaper clippings, and booklets. She sat on the couch, feet under her, stubby painted toes near my hand. Dumping the folder out all over her lap, she said, "He's had the usual manufacturer's lawsuits—suits claiming he had received damaged raw material. Here, in 1939 he was sued on a buzzer patent and won. In 1949 he sued a bank for $20,000, claiming somebody named Butler had forged his name to a check for that amount and it was the bank's responsibility to check his signature. Handwriting experts agreed it was a forged signature and the bank had to make good to Wren."

"In 1949. What month? You know Butler's full name, if he was ever collared?"

"Collared?"

"Arrested?"

"No. I only have a grief note on it. You said, 'he'. I don't recall if Butler was a man or woman. But you can check the '49 papers or a newspaper morgue. Can't you tell me what you're looking for? I might be of more help."

"It doesn't add: I'm looking for a killer and he's just a business sharp-shooter."

Rose gathered up her notes. "Do I detect a chamber-of-commerce-sanctimonious sound when you said 'business'? The bigger the business the more ruthless the . . ."

"Hey, get off the soap-box . . . Honey, I'm looking for a cold blooded thug who has shot one man, maybe two. Much as you dislike Wren I doubt if you'd call him a murderer, a killer."

She shrugged and the red shirt did a Rumba. "No, I doubt if he would use a gun. But remember a gun or a knife are the more obvious weapons, poverty has killed more people than all the bullets ever made . . ."

I grabbed one of the catalogues of Wren & Co., made believe I was going to shut her lips with it. "Now, don't give me speeches. This killer is the kind who didn't hesitate to use a gun in daytime on the street, in a furnished room with . . ." I stopped talking, stared at the cover of the catalogue. There was a little brown bird on the corner of the cover. "What's this?"

"An advertising tag Wren used at one time . . . Wren . . . a small brown bird."

A warm glow started up my spine and then faded away. "You see, another damn coincidence. There was a man involved, after a fashion, in the . . . Anybody ever call Wren, or was he ever known as the Bird?"

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"I never heard him called that. I still don't know what this is all about."

I stood up. "Forget it, I talk too much. I'm keeping you from your writing and I'm due at my mother's for supper and she'll be sore enough without my being late. And don't worry about Wren ever bothering you again, he told me he's given you up. Tell me, when these calls and the shadowing first started, did you ever notice a plump, middle-aged man asking around about you? Shabby dresser. Have you ever heard the name Francis Parker?"

"No, I never saw anybody except those men who pushed me on the street. First time I didn't see who pushed me, then the time before you saw them, they had reversed things—the tall one did the jostling. My curiosity is eating me up. What . . . ?"

"When did the calls first start, when did you first think you were being shadowed?"

"About a week ago."

"Only a week ago?" That could still figure—once Owens gave him the dope it might have taken Wren time to find the right private eye. Only the woods were full of starving private badges, why should it take him a month to find one? And even if Wren was the Bird, why should he kill Owens and Wales 25 years after Sal Kahn burned? Still it was a hell of a lead to look into. I glanced at my watch. "I'm late."

"But you can't leave me hanging like this—what's it all about?"

"Honey, that old saying about what you don't know won't hurt you may be terribly true in this case. We're dealing with a killer. And if I told you the wild idea batting around in my noggin, the least might happen to you would be a rough libel suit. Forget I ran my big mouth. Goodbye now." I winked at her and opened the door.

Rose looked astonished, then laughed, deep real laughter. "I never had anybody wink at me before."

"Then you're long due. I'll drop in again." I waved and ran down the steps.

I walked slowly up to the corner, not sure what to do. Crime cases follow set patterns—if it had been a killing done in a moment of anger it could be Wren, it could be anybody. But both these were obviously carefully planned killings. And a successful business man isn't a gun for hire, doesn't go to a man's room and kill him, or gun a guy in an alley. If anything, he'd hire a goon and a guy like Wren would have to be out of his mind to hire a killer; be paying off the rest of his life. Actually, the only real link Wren had to the case was the job he gave Owens to do on Rose and that wasn't much of a link. As for his being the Bird, the

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phone book was full of Eagles and Robbins. And if Wren was involved, it sure wasn't a one-man job nailing him down. A dozen men should be digging into his past; his homelife, his neighbors, his plant should be staked out. And the same thing went for the Owens family. And the Data jerks.

I'd given myself a deadline and it was past that. Although they might hand my head to me on my badge for not reporting all this sooner, I headed for the precinct.

Lt. Reed was out, but Captain Lampkin was sitting behind his desk, his blue and gold coat open like a drape, his white shirt bunched up over his belt. He was reading a teletype and after a moment he turned his big puss up at me and asked slowly, "You on duty, Wintino?"

"No sir. But I have something that may help on the Owens-Wales murders," I said, placing the bank book on his desk. "This was found taped under Owens' dresser drawer by his daughter Susan, along with four thousand dollars in fifty buck bills. I have a list of the bills, Susan Owens has the money in a sealed envelope. I also have the tape home—might raise some prints. I've checked with the bank and from the signature, Francis Parker was Ed Owens. The check for $4000.75 was paid to Owens by a manufacturer named Edwin Wren. He claims he agreed to pay Owens a grand for doing some private work in connection with a case our squad is handling: a writer named Rose Henderson is—was—being annoyed by strange phone calls, pushed around and rough-shadowed on the street. She's doing an article that exposes Wren's and several other companies as a monopoly. I took care of that, Wren has agreed to stop it. But he says he hired Owens about six weeks ago and that Owens then blackmailed him for the four grand."

"When did you learn about the money and bank book?" Lampkin asked, his slow voice reminding me of a funeral—mine.

"Late last night. Mrs. Owens phoned here yesterday that she wanted to see me. She wasn't exactly holding out, but she wanted me to check this morning and see if it was evidence or not . . . four grand isn't carfare."

"And too much to pay for private work."

"Yes sir. Seems Owens was using a phoney name, according to Wren, to avoid paying tax. I figure it might be a motive for Owens death, although it seems pretty far-fetched. As for Wales, he doesn't fit in, but I have a hunch, a theory, about an old collar Wales and Owens made, that should be looked into. Has some odd angles."

"Seems like both Owens and Wales had something going for themselves."

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"That's what I think, Captain. I wasn't trying to solo on this, just wanted to check before I turned it over to you."

"Nice of you to do this on your own time, Wintino. I'll send the dope down to Central Bureau. This Wren in the phone book?"

"Yes sir, Edwin Wren & Co., they make electrical gadgets. I'd like to work with Central on this, or at least talk over my theory with them," I said, almost high with relief. And I wasn't going to let the glory hounds downtown get the credit on this—if anything broke.

"When are you due in?"

"Tomorrow, midnight."

"This theory of yours, does it require immediate action?"

"I don't think so. You understand, Captain, I'm not sure of anything, just a strong hunch that may blow up."

"They haven't even got a weak hunch working on the Wales killing, so might be worth looking into yours," Lampkin said, picking up his phone. He asked for an inspector at Central Bureau. Lampkin told him about the bank book and the Inspector must have put on the detective who was handling the case and Lampkin repeated what I'd told him about the bank book and Wren and that I had a theory about Wales. Then he said, "Dave Wintino, Detective 3rd Grade—yeah, yeah, he made that maniac arrest. The Owens family called him last night and told him about the money. Why? Maybe because he has a trusting face. What? Come off it, Wally, on his own time he found out who gave Owens the check and why, saved you fellows a lot of leg-work. Yeah, he's a real beaver. You know these young studs—all pistols. Says he has something on Wales, an idea, he wants to talk over. Midnight tour tomorrow. Sure, that's okay, he won't mind."

Lampkin hung up and stared at the phone for a moment as if in deep thought, then he looked up at me. "Call Detective Shavers at Central Bureau in the morning, around ten. He'll arrange to meet you. What's the matter with your face? Haven't you outgrown boils yet, or don't you know how to shave right?"

"Why I . . . well sir, I was in a fight."

"I hear you're handy with your dukes. Remember we have several posts here in need of a tough beat cop," Lampkin said, drawing out each word the way he always talked—like it was an effort. He picked up the teletype report.

I started for the door, then asked, "Anything new on Wales, sir?"

He shook his big head. "Nothing, haven't even found anybody to question. Yeah, they found he sometimes got himself one of these expensive young call girls, holed up in a hotel room with her and a

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couple of bottles, knocked himself out. About every three months. Told the girls he was a buyer from Chicago. A guy his age doing that, don't know where he got the juice. Certainly can't tell about people nowadays."

I said yes sir and walked out. I heard him mutter, "I don't know what the world is coming to."

FRIDAY EVENING

I was feeling tops when I reached the old apartment—I'd been so damn sure Lampkin was going to bust me for working alone. I don't know why but soon as I kissed Ma and hugged Pa the high feeling left. Then I was sore at myself for being restless in my parents' home.

Despite it being a warm night, Ma gave me the full treatment—minestrone, gufelte fish, lasagna, and boiled chicken. Whenever I said I had enough she would give me another helping as she asked, "You sick, Dave, or don't you like *my* cooking anymore?"

Pa kept right up with me, even had room to pack away the dessert—noodle pudding in fruit sauce. The old boy looked good. As Ma gave me all the latest family gossip Pa, full of his usual sly humor, smoked one of his strong black Italian cigars and made snide remarks about both sides of the family.

Pop turned on the TV while Ma did the dishes and we sat like a couple of slugs, dozing off at an old movie.

When Pop changed stations he made a mock bow and told me, "Behold what television does to culture. At your Mother's age she must see a cowboy movie every night."

"Shhh," Mom said sitting down.

I sat in the semi-darkness, sleepy and full, suddenly thinking of Owens and his wife watching their old TV, another happy home . . . and him out hustling a four grand cushion. And a penny snatcher like Wales spending all his dough on a hopelessly sick wife . . . how damn lonely he must have been to loosen up and spend a couple of hundred bucks with a call girl. What must it feel like, dressing like a slop, working for twenty-five bucks a week: With eleven grand wrapped around your gut?

The phone rang and Pa got it, said, "Yes, He's here. We were sorry you couldn't make it tonight. Yes, get some rest . . . the heat takes it's

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toll . . . Mama had a wonderful supper. Maybe next Friday. . . . I'll call him."

He put the phone down and came over to me, "Your wife is on the phone, David." I picked up the receiver, asked, "Yeah Mary?"

"Dave I feel nervous, scary. I . . . Can you come home right away?"

"Sure. What's the matter?"

"Nothing really, except I have this feeling. Three times in the last hour the phone has rung and each time there wasn't any answer, not a sound."

"Nothing to get excited about. Could be a couple of wrong numbers, or something wrong with the phone."

"Davie, please come home. It may be silly, but each time I said hello, the more certain I was that somebody was listening at the other end. The phone was *too* quiet. Please Davie, I'm jittery."

"Okay babes. I'll leave now and be there within an hour. Make you feel better, go visit a neighbor and I'll pick you up there."

When I tried to explain it to Ma she said, "What's the matter, she can't let us have you for a few hours? She's nervous and . . . David, is she pregnant?"

"Not that I heard. Guess I'd better go." I wondered if the three phone calls were an accident. But it didn't make sense for the Data clowns to start giving me the works. And Wren had said he was calling them off. Maybe she had seen a horror show on TV . . . and three calls were spooky to a girl home alone. Still, she wasn't the emotional kind . . . but she might really be tired and upset. I could phone the local precinct to have the beat cop look in, but how would that sound?"

Ma hinted that Mary was doing all this on purpose and Pop said, "Such nonsense, Mama. And if his wife is nervous, no matter what the reason, what else should the boy do but rush home? Dave call us the moment you reach your house."

I said I would. I made good time, it was a few minutes under ten-fifteen when I ran up the subway steps and headed toward our place. If this was the Data boys, if I found Flatts hanging around my place, I'd give him a beating he'd sure never forget. But when I reached our corner, turned into the block, everything looked so quiet and peaceful I decided to have it out with Mary. If this was her sneaky way of getting back at me for having supper with the folks it was time we found out where we stood. In fact that time was long due.

When I'm mad I walk fast and I was rushing into the entrance of our house when I heard the sudden step behind me, felt a hell of a big gun shoved in my right side. Then a heavy arm went around my neck,

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hugging my shoulder in a hard embrace and Mr. Wren was saying loudly, "No more talking, not this late. Come on, let's have a last drink."

It was a good act even though nobody was around to see it; looked like a friendly greeting. His left arm casually around my shoulder while his right held the gun—inside his coat pocket—against my side. We were about the same height and I was looking smack into his eyes, eyes distorted by his thick glasses. At first I was so completely surprised at seeing Wren—if anybody, I'd expected the Data clowns—my mind was a blank. But one look at those eyes and I got scared, but fast.

He said gently, jovially, "Oh now, just one last nightcap." Then the whisper: "Keep your hands in sight. If you're not foolish you may live. Now walk!"

If he had pushed me, if his gun had left my side for a second, I might have made my play. But he was smart, waited for me to walk, then moved with me, like we were a couple of chums. There wasn't a person in sight on the dimly lit street as we headed toward 2nd Avenue. Then his left hand neatly slid inside my coat while his gun—feeling as big and round as a shotgun barrel—pressed into my kidney as he took my gun from the shoulder holster. He didn't try to pocket the gun, merely pushed it up his sleeve and kept walking with his arm around my shoulder.

We were three stores and a tenement from 2nd Avenue. The first store had a FOR RENT sign in the window—it had been a ritzy gift shop till a few months ago. He suddenly steered me into the doorway, looked around quickly, then opened the door and his gun pushed me in.

Closing the door softly he told me, "Clasp the back of your neck with both hands, please," and his gun slid around my side to my neck, like a snake. "Blink your eyes to get used to the darkness, then walk toward the back of the store. A false move, even if you should trip, and I'll be forced to kill you. Walk—slowly."

I walked. I felt lost, beaten. He knew his business, no chance for me to kick backwards. The pressure of the gun barrel lessened and then from the sound of his steps and the heat of his body, I knew he was walking an arm's length back of me.

Blinking my eyes I saw the store was empty except for an open arched doorway we were nearing. Wren said, "Walk straight through the center of the opening, turn slowly—when I tell you."

We walked into what must have been a small stock room. A little door to my right was ajar and outlined by dim light—not a light within the room but coming from outside.

He told me to turn and open the door. The room was the size of a

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phone booth—this was the john with a tiny barred window high up that caught some faint light from 2nd Avenue. There wasn't room for the two of us.

Wren said, "Turn around and sit on the toilet—with your hands in sight. I didn't mean any comical touch but this is the best place I could find for an undisturbed talk. Man's confidence in locks is touching, even in a simple spring lock on a store door."

I sat down as Wren leaned against the doorway, the light giving his glasses a weird smoky look. He was wearing pigskin gloves and the pistol in his hand had a bulky silencer—which was why it had felt big as a shotgun in my back. He said, "I'm sorry to pull a gun on you, and all this hocus-pocus. We may part as friends. I hope so, sincerely I hope that. Killing is a terrible thing, an idiotic gesture that. . . ."

The tightness within me suddenly shot up to my mouth; I had to talk. "You're not going to kill me!" I said, my voice still high. "You're not that much of a fool. I reported my visit to your office, if I'm found dead you'll be number one on the suspect parade!" I sounded hysterical; was surprised I could still wisecrack.

"Don't raise your voice," he said, holding my gun in his left hand as he pocketed his own, then switched my gun to his right hand. The sight of my own rod made me snap out of it—no matter what happened I had to get my gun back. Wren said, "As for any report, I must doubt that. You are young and cocksure, out to make a name. After you left the one thing that remained in my mind was your saying you were working on your own time. I figure you for a glory hunter, a lone hand. Otherwise you would have visited me with your partner."

His voice was still weary and in the deadness of the empty store very clear.

"Although I hold a gun on you, Wintino, this is not necessarily an unfriendly conversation. We shall . . ."

"Sure, you're doing me a big favor, I get knocked off in a store in instead of in an alley like Owens got his!" My voice was back to normal.

He smiled, a very tired smile. "Your bravado has returned—fine. Only don't let it go to your head, you'll have need for some clear thinking. As for Owens—I didn't kill him. I wouldn't be here now except I suspected you realized the blunder I made in my office."

"Yeah?" I said, trying to stall for time to think.

He belched slightly, there was a light odor of whiskey. "Whether you are pretending innocence or not doesn't matter now. When you asked about the check, I'd thought all along that Wales had forged it, that's why I had to shoot him. A sad error, perhaps my undoing. I completely mis-

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judged Wales. He was an honest and intelligent man."

I felt as if I'd got a shot in the arm, even the heavy meal in my belly seemed to have digested. One word kept banging in my brain, clearing the cobwebs—*forged*. Wren had sued a bank for a forged check at the time when Wales' wife had run up a big hospital bill. I said, "You mean you thought it was Wales forging a second check?"

He blinked, or something happened behind those foggy glasses. "You are far smarter than I thought. So you know about that, although Wales didn't forge the check—exactly. I'm going to tell you certain things not because I want to, but because I sincerely don't wish to kill you."

"You touch me—Bird!"

Another belch, the hairs of his moustache flying in the breeze. "Don't be stupid-brave, Wintino. That's all I ask you. Listen to me and think, think like a man not like a kid. Wintino, *live and let live*. It's a remarkable philosophy, the basic rule of our world. Self-preservation is said to be the first law of life, but we really protect ourselves by following the live and let live rule. I'm not preaching to you, or talking about something abstract. I've found from bitter experience that . . ."

I wasn't listening. Wales had been so right—keep digging. I had never bothered to check Wren's signature on the Parker check. Well, hell with that now. The bathroom was small and he was in the doorway, less than three feet away. He'd be watching my right hand, by leaning forward I might be able to hook his fat belly with my left. The light was dim, if I fell forward to my right I might belt him fast enough to fall out of the line of fire.

". . . So, if I can explain, you'll be able to understand what this is all about. I'm sorry you're so young, an older man would see the logic. Wales did. And Solly Kahn. I'm not a thug or . . ."

"Some logic! Wales is dead!"

"A rash mistake on my part, as I said. Perhaps that's why I'm talking to you—I don't want to make another mistake."

"Get down to the facts. Why did you kill Wales?"

He shook his head gently. "Since I have the gun I will do the talking. Sit back, make yourself comfortable, Wintino. And I know how to use a gun. Now—you never went through a depression. My engineering degree wasn't worth a damn. I was forced to work as a waiter, pearl diver, anything for a meal. While I was living in a cheap boarding house I met Solly Kahn. To you Solly is probably only a man with a record, to me he is a saint. He was a bootlegger and the trouble with bootlegging was the expense and risk of running the stuff in. A still in the city was hard to hide and . . ."

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"And you made an electric one," I cut in, watching the lights on his glasses.

"I did, and an excellent piece of engineering it was, a silent still. Solly and I started making money, big money for those hard times—nearly six thousand dollars." Wren waved my gun in a small arc, as if making a big point. "I was a bootlegger, breaking the law, if you wish, but I'd found laws are a fraud. I lived by a law that said if you work hard you get ahead and if it wasn't for Solly I'd have been selling apples on a corner. I suppose you think you know the rest?"

"Sure I do. Kahn gunned Boots Brenner when he tried to muscle in," I said. I had a sudden uneasy feeling, neither fear nor anger, but kind of as though I was watching something, as if I was seeing myself on a stage.

"The obvious details. Solly shot this thug in self-defense, we were sure he wouldn't get the chair. But the gun was mine, I had a permit for it. When he was caught Solly carefullly hid the weapon behind a loose brick in the wall. I was . . ."

"That's what Wales was searching for all those years," I cut in.

Again that tired smile. "You are more thorough than I imagined. Yes, the gun was hidden and Solly never talked, not even when facing the chair. You see I wasn't around the plant much, I was still seeking that token of respectability and security, a job at my profession. And Solly, who never had been inside a College, demonstrated the highest intelligence, he didn't see any sense in incriminating me. What good would it do? Can you understand that?" He paused, his stomach rumbling. "Tell me, detective, what good would it have done? Would justice have been served any better? Would anything be gained by ruining me? Tell me, Wintino, what would you have done if you had found the gun?"

"Arrested you as an accessory to the crime. You would have had your day in court."

"My day in court? When there weren't any jobs for engineers what chance would I have had, what future, smeared and with a criminal record? That's the real fact of the matter and Solly realized that. Live and let live— he let me live. It was his money, his and mine, that enabled me to start my factory. Sal Kahn, a true human being. I've never forgotten him."

"I know, that monthly registered letter to his mother."

Wren stared at me, his glasses like two dull headlights. "I certainly didn't make any mistake seeing you, Wintino. You know so much more than I expected."

"You still made a mistake," I said, closing my eyes for a second. The

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light on those thick lenses seemed to hypnotize me. "Pointing a gun at a cop is a big mistake."

"I'm not talking to a cop but to a human being. I trust the gun will never enter our conversation. But let me remind you this is a vacant store and the gun will be your gun. Naturally I have set up an alibi, not to mention the fact that I am a successful manufacturer—we are rarely accused of such things as murder. Now, let me finish. We both will have an important decision to reach then."

"You have the gun, talk." I kept my eyes on my gun—away from his glasses.

"Kahn did the human thing, let me live when there was no point in hurting me. The missing gun was a big item at the trial, although it wouldn't have made any difference in the verdict. Al Wales was one of those lucky people who never work—they enjoy their job and hence it ceases to be work. He never gave up searching for the gun in the old building. I had nightmares over the gun for many years—the serial number would point at me. Well, Wales did find the gun and he was an intelligent man, too. He realized I had nothing to do with the actual killing, that I had used the money to build my factory; I had gone straight—to use a trite phrase that has no meaning. So even though he at last had the evidence he had hunted for over many years, he did nothing about it. Live and let live."

"Wales isn't living."

"I've told you I made a stupid error," Wren said, his voice coming alive with anger. "Wales didn't use his evidence because he was a sensible man like Solly who . . ."

"And they're both dead."

"Wintino, stop talking like a phonograph record! Yes they are dead and you and I are alive and want to stay that way. In 1949, years after he found the gun—Wales did another intelligent thing. He needed money for an operation on his wife and came to me. Understand it wasn't blackmail but live and let live. He needed help in his living. We talked things over, much as we are . . ."

"You hold a gun on him, too?"

"Wales was a mature man, guns weren't necessary. As it happened I didn't have any cash handy. I'd been expanding rapidly. However, I felt my obligation to Wales so we both hit upon the idea of letting a bank give Wales the money. It was rather a neat idea, one that my business situation made ideal."

There was another tired grin. I looked at his eyes. Then at the street light on the gun barrel. I counted the buttons on his coat, a left beside the

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last button would kayo him. Even if he shot me, I'd have a chance to grab my gun.

The silence in the coffin-like room was heavy and I glanced at his eyes, the glasses seemed to bore into my eyes. I had this feeling again that I was watching a movie.

Wren said, "I was waiting to see if you had caught on to our scheme—you'd be a genius if you had. I will tell you about it to illustrate how two men under stress can work together in perfect harmony. Wren & Co. was doing a large turnover and checks for five, ten, twenty, even thirty thousand dollars cleared through my account fairly often. Wales opened an account in a Bronx bank using an alias and a fake address. Over a two month period he made a few deposits and withdrawals and in the meantime practiced forging my name—with my help. At the beginning of the third month he forged my name to a check, made out to his alias, for twenty thousand dollars. It was on a regular printed Wren & Co. check. He deposited this in his new account. It was truly a foolproof scheme. Banks rarely check signatures but if my bank should question mine, if they called me to verify it, I was to tell them it was my signature but I wanted the check stopped, for business reasons. That would have been the end of it. In that case I would have mortgaged my plant to raise Wales' money. Look at me Wintino, or doesn't this interest you?"

"Yeah. I'm all ears. The bank let the check go through and in a few weeks Wales closed out his account and the phony name became a dead-end."

Wren nodded and the light seemed to make his glasses spin. "Yes, the check went through without a hitch and Wales gave me my old gun, which I destroyed. On the 2nd of the following month, when I received my bank statement, I naturally made a fuss about the forged check. I had three experts testify my signature was a forgery. Legally I had to go through the red tape of suing the bank. Within a few months the suit came up and I won, of course. Wales had his money without any strain on my part. You see what two intelligent men can do when they put their minds to work?"

"I see, you robbed a bank."

"Technically, yes. But who suffered? The bank was insured and as for the insurance companies, perhaps this caused them to raise their rates 1/100th of one percent. Being a smart man Wales didn't do anything to arouse suspicion. By that I mean he never put the money in his regular account, nor did he start living big. He played strictly by our rules."

"Is that why he's dead?"

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"A mistake. I keep telling you that! I frankly told Wales he was in a position to keep forging my name. I impressed upon him that I had carried out my end of the deal—and if he ever tried blackmailing me in the future, killing would be the only answer. For over seven years I never heard from Wales. Then, several days ago when I received my monthly bank statement and cancelled checks I found . . ."

"A forged check for $4000.75 made out to a Francis Parker," I said, getting the complete picture fast. "Wales must have kept things a secret from Owens—till a couple months ago. Wales probably blabbered while juiced and Owens decided to try his luck."

"Precisely, except I was certain it was Wales tapping me again. I can hardly be blamed for assuming that. And the only real answer to blackmail is a bullet. Actually I didn't even read about Owens death until after I shot Wales and the papers played up both killings. I didn't know a thing about Owens' death but I felt it would benefit me by throwing off any possible suspicion on me. It wasn't until you came into my office and said Owens had the money that I realized Owens had got into the game. Undoubtedly Wales killed Owens in the alley to make it look like a robbery. Must have told him to stop and Owens wanted another crack at my jackpot. You can see Wales *had* to kill him, to protect himself. Just as I thought I *had* to kill Wales. I blundered. I shot him while he was in a drunken sleep. He died without pain but I never gave him a chance to explain. I admit it was a terrible blunder, but that's over, nothing we do now can ever bring Wales back to life."

"What's there to do?" I asked, keeping my eyes on his thick moustache.

"That's the point of our talk. I want to live, Wintino. I want to avoid a scandal that will haunt my wife and children forever. You're young, life is ahead of you. I'm in a position to offer you $35,000 in cash. If you spend it wisely and slowly—keep your job—it means a comfortable nest egg for the rest of your years. Naturally you'll have to keep the money in a safe deposit vault, spend it carefully. Even your wife must never know."

"I'm not buying, Bird. A couple of ex-cops are killed and nobody gives a damn—but I do. You've confessed a murder, I'm going to take you in. If you kill me they'll collar you because I did make a report about my visit to you."

"Boy, don't make me kill you!" Wren said. "Even if you really did make such a report, I can cover the Owens check with the yarn I gave you this afternoon. And I have an alibi for every second of the day Wales was killed. If I have to make a run for it, killing you will give

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me time and as the old saying goes, they can only hang me once. Please think about . . ."

"There's nothing to think about. You killed Wales. I'm a cop. I have to arrest you."

"Can't you understand—it would be your duty to arrest me if you thought that by letting me go you were endangering society. There never will be any reason, any *need* for me to kill again. If we act intelligently we can both live in peace."

"And when will I get it like Wales did?" I raised my right hand slowly to my head, pretended to scratch my hair.

Wren's gun hand followed my right as he said, "Never, unless you try to blackmail me. Or if I tried to blackmail you, I would expect you to kill me. Wintino, this isn't something to haggle about. I'll go the limit—$50,000 and you get it all by Tuesday."

"Bribing an officer of the law is an additional . . ."

"*Bribing?* You stupid ass of a kid! You must realize what big money means in this world, what . . ."

I set my feet and raised my right hand toward my head again. As his eyes and my gun followed, I threw myself forward, on my right shoulder, bringing up as hard a left hook as I could.

The tiny room came alive with thunder and the stink of gunpowder. I felt the punch up to my elbow, my fist ramming into his fat belly. A gut punch is a paralyzer. I saw him sinking to the floor, nothing moving except his mouth, which seemed open in a wide scream of fear.

I reached out and grabbed his right hand, digging my nails in his wrist till he dropped my gun. I picked it up and got to my feet—and as I stood up a hot wire ripped across my stomach like a burning knife. Everything was pain, searing pain that made me sink to my knees beside him and scream and scream and scream.

I pressed my stomach to hold down the burning and felt blood—the bastard had shot me. The first time my gun was used on a man it had to be me.

I was on my knees, trying not to keel over, almost on top of Wren, who lay there, crumpled, not moving, mouth open as far as he could get it. His glasses had half fallen off his nose and one eye was enlarged by a lens and bright with pain; the other was a small glitter in the dim light. He wasn't out, just stunned by the gut belt.

I tried to move and pain went through my body like a million knives and I screamed again and again . . . and heard only silence. The store was full of the same old dusty stillness. My mouth was open but I wasn't making a sound. The silence of the empty store had absorbed the brief

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bark of the gun. It was crazy, nothing had changed—except I'd be dead in another ten minutes, an hour at the longest. And in a few minutes Wren would be able to walk away.

His eyes were mocking me now, at least the one eye covered by his glasses. I looked away, at my gun in my hand, was damn glad I was going out like a real cop. When I raised my gun Wren's eye grew so big with fear I thought it would pop through the thick glass.

I said, "I'm not going to kill you," but the words slid all around my mouth and I chewed on them as the pain throbbed deep in me like a long piston-needle going up and down in my guts.

I sent a bullet through his knee cap to anchor him. There wasn't any thunder this time, merely a sharp clear bark and a flash of orange, both swallowed by the darkness of the store, never heard outside.

Wren was on his back, out cold—fainted. I took a deep breath that seemed to smother the pointed burning within me; I pulled his gun out of his pocket, crawled over him. The crawling put my blood on fire and when I reached the archway that opened on the store, I had to let go, sink into pain.

When I came to, the pain was still throbbing steadily in my stomach, stabbing at my heart and brain now and then. Everything about me seemed wet with blood. There was a dull sound behind me. I had to listen for many sounds before I realized it was Wren moaning, calling for help. I got up on my knees, it was easier to move on my knees than to crawl.

I made the left wall of the store and I couldn't move another inch.

Holding my gun in my left hand, I took out Wren's. I tried a deep breath. It didn't work, the air came rushing down my throat hot and dry. I had to rest for a few seconds, then pivoting on my left shoulder I heaved Wren's gun in the direction of the window. I heard myself scream this time all right, heard it over the crash of glass. I didn't know, but it was me and I was screaming, *"Dad! Dad!"*

I slumped against the wall and waited, each breath tearing my lungs apart with strain and fire. The broken window was a foggy square and for a long, long time nothing happened. I had to let go again, fell into the fire inside me.

Opening my eyes was a big job. The window was still foggy . . . with the pale blur of a face looking in.

Aiming at the ceiling I fired my gun fast as I could. On the third shot it jumped out of my hand. I'd lost my gun again but I had to let go. I had to let go of everything. No flames this time, nothing . . . I was falling over and over into nothing.

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THERE WAS A vase with red roses on the metal table in one corner of the hospital room. The roses were very red. Not many and the cheapest kind—a few dumpy roses with petals open in a big grin. I knew who'd sent them.

I shut my eyes again. I'd never felt so pooped. Of course I knew where I was. I'd been semi-conscious when the beat cop had knelt beside me, took his gun off me when he found my badge. I'd passed out in the ambulance but came to when a nurse was cutting my clothes off—ruining my suit—just before they gave me a shot that put me to sleep. I awoke for a few seconds when I was getting a transfusion, then dropped off for a long sleep. I vaguely recalled talking to Lt. Reed and some hatchet-faced Inspector from downtown, the two of them hovering over my bed like a couple of ugly birds. I gave them the dope on Wren and Wales.

I opened my eyes and moved my head. The shade was down but it was bright outside. Looking made me tired and I kept staring straight ahead at the roses—roses from Rose and as red as her mouth. I was probably all over the papers and Rose had come soon as she read about it.

A nurse came in, a long gawky babe who had to look better when out of the white dress, the horrible stockings and white shoes. Over a standard smile she asked, "How do you feel, Mr. Wintino?"

"Okay." Her fingers were firm and cool as she took my pulse. "When did the flowers come?"

"Must have come this morning, before I came on. Shall I find out who they're from?"

"Do that and see if there was any message."

The nurse slipped me what was supposed to be a wise smile. "Your wife is waiting. Feel up to seeing her, for a little while?"

"Sure. Got a mirror and comb?"

"Not yet. You mustn't attempt to sit up or move about."

"Am I going to be stuck in bed long?"

"You ask the doctor about that. I'll send Mrs. Wintino in. The moment you feel tired, stop talking, tell your wife to leave. Sleep is the best medicine you can get at the moment."

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The nurse left and my eyelids weighed a ton. I don't know, I thought I opened them a second after but it must have been longer. Mary was sitting beside my bed, looked like she'd been sitting there a long time. She looked pretty bad, blonde hair uncombed, eyes red, face strained, a tired stoop to her shoulders. And the roses on the table behind her seemed to frame her head.

I'd never seen her look so bad. I stared at her face, and the red of the roses, and thought how silly it was for us to keep knocking each other out. This was the right time to settle things. I said, "Hello babes."

She must have been day-dreaming, she jumped a little. "Dave, Dave, how are you feeling?" She began to cry gently.

"A bit tired. Why the tears, I'm okay? Understand they had to stitch up my guts and I know there's a drain sticking in me someplace . . . But in a few days I'll be up and around, out of here."

"Of course you will. I'll try to get a week off at the office, and we'll go someplace in the country and rest."

"You need a rest. Sure, we'll have a whole week to rest and talk about it."

"Talk about what?"

"Come on, honey, I know you too well, it's all over your face. You can't wait to talk."

"Dave, you're in a hospital, just take it easy and . . ."

"No, honey, let's talk this out now. I feel like it."

"Dave, you're getting excited, tired. You need sleep and . . ."

"Babes, I'll be more excited if we don't talk. Go ahead, spill it."

"Really, Dave, I don't know what you mean. You sleep and I'll . . ."

"Mary, let's get this settled. I'll let you know when I'm tired."

"What do you want me to say?" Her voice was a whine.

"All the words you've been saving up for me. Let them go, be the best thing for both of us."

"Well," she hesitated, her red eyes staring at me. "All right, we'll talk, if you wish."

"That's what I wish."

"Dave, you sound so . . . I don't know." Her voice became high and thin. "Dave, Dave, listen to me: I can't take this any longer. I can't stand waiting around for my husband to come home, worry myself crazy till the middle of the morning when I'm informed you're in a hospital, nearly dead. That's no way for us to live . . . Oh Dave, this isn't the time or place, I can't talk about it now."

"Yes you can, say it." The roses seemed to be laughing at her.

"Dave . . ." the tears really rolled . . . "Well Dave, you either have

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to give up being a cop or we're done. Dave, I can't take it. I can't!'

"Don't cry, Mary. You want me to go to work for Uncle Frank at forty a week?"

"Please Dave, we don't have to talk about this now? We . . ."

"Yes we do have to talk about it! Is working for Uncle Frank what you want?"

"All I want is to have you work normal hours, where there's no chance of you ever being shot or beaten up. Is that unreasonable? I don't care what you do, as long as you're not a cop."

"I'm going to remain a cop."

"Why?" she asked loudly, hysterically.

"Because I'm not only the youngest detective on the force, at this moment I'm the *best*. That's important—I could never be the best stock clerk in the city or the best anything else. And because it's *my* job. I . . ." Talking sure took it out of me: I let the words fade on my lips.

Mary sat up very straight and stiff as she said, "Dave, we're . . . we're . . . finished."

"I think so, babes. Now it's in the open."

She seemed to fall apart as she put her face in her hands, cried into them. "Is that all you can say? Dave, why must you be so tough, so hard?"

"Honey, honey, I'm not being tough. Don't you see, we've been finished for a long time, but we were both afraid to face it. You want a guy you can steer, somebody you can push together with, up the same road. All this striving is important to you but not me." My voice got low and I stopped for a moment, felt strength flowing back into me like a tiny tide.

Mary said through her tears, "Don't talk, Dave, it isn't good for you to . . ."

"It's great for me. Babes, you want this cocktail dueling, the clever hustle. You wouldn't be satisfied if I was working for Uncle Frank. There'd always be another job and then another—up some imaginary ladder. There's no sense in our hurting each other. Mary honey, you're a nice girl and when you get the right man you'll both hit it off. I'm not that man. I'm a cop."

"*Cop!* You're happy because you're a big hero again, another citation, maybe a medal this time, and you'll be the youngest second grade detective now. That's what you enjoy, being a cocky wiseguy because you think you're something special, something on a stick: It's all your goddamn vanity!"

"And if I do enjoy my job, if I am cocky, where do you come off

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always trying to change me? Babes don't you see, it's no good if we have to change each other?"

She ran a handkerchief over her face. "It's a waste of time talking to you, Dave, you're so stubborn."

"It's a waste of time because we see things differently."

She stood up. "Breaking up a marriage isn't pleasant. Dave, I want to give us every chance. Why can't you get a leave from the force and try it my way? I've tried yours and it's made me a nervous wreck."

"Mary, playing catch-up never works. You're young and pretty, you'll get the right guy."

"Made up your mind for a long time now, haven't you?"

"No, but I can say it easily now. I want to put in my hours as a cop and not come home to a night of arguing. That's all."

"Your noble cops! The reporters talked to me, the papers are full of the story, the *good* cops you spent your free time working on, stopped a bullet for—what were they but a couple of cheap chiselers, shakedown artists!"

My eyes were too heavy to keep open. "I was shot bringing in a murderer, what I'm paid to do. Maybe I was a little screwy, put a halo around a badge. From now on it will just be a job to me, but a job I like."

The room was very quiet, reminded me of the stillness of the store. I opened my eyes: Mary was gone. I felt nervous, lousy, and relieved. I turned my head to the cool side of the pillow. I ought to sleep, be strong enough to chatter and bull when Danny came . . . and when Rose came. Not that she liked cops much either. But with her it wouldn't matter too . . .

The lanky nurse returned. I asked, "What's the message?"

Again the SOP smile. "No message with the flowers. A woman brought them—your mother."

I closed my eyes. "Listen, when my partner, Danny Hayes, comes in, wake me. And if a Miss Henderson should call . . . well, be sure to wake me, if she visits or phones."

But I knew she wouldn't.

THE END

This book will be published in hard-cover edition by Harper & Brothers later this fall, under the title "Lead With Your Left". Look for it at your local bookstore.

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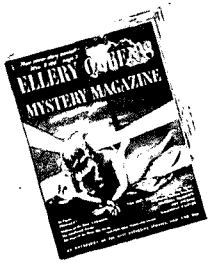

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